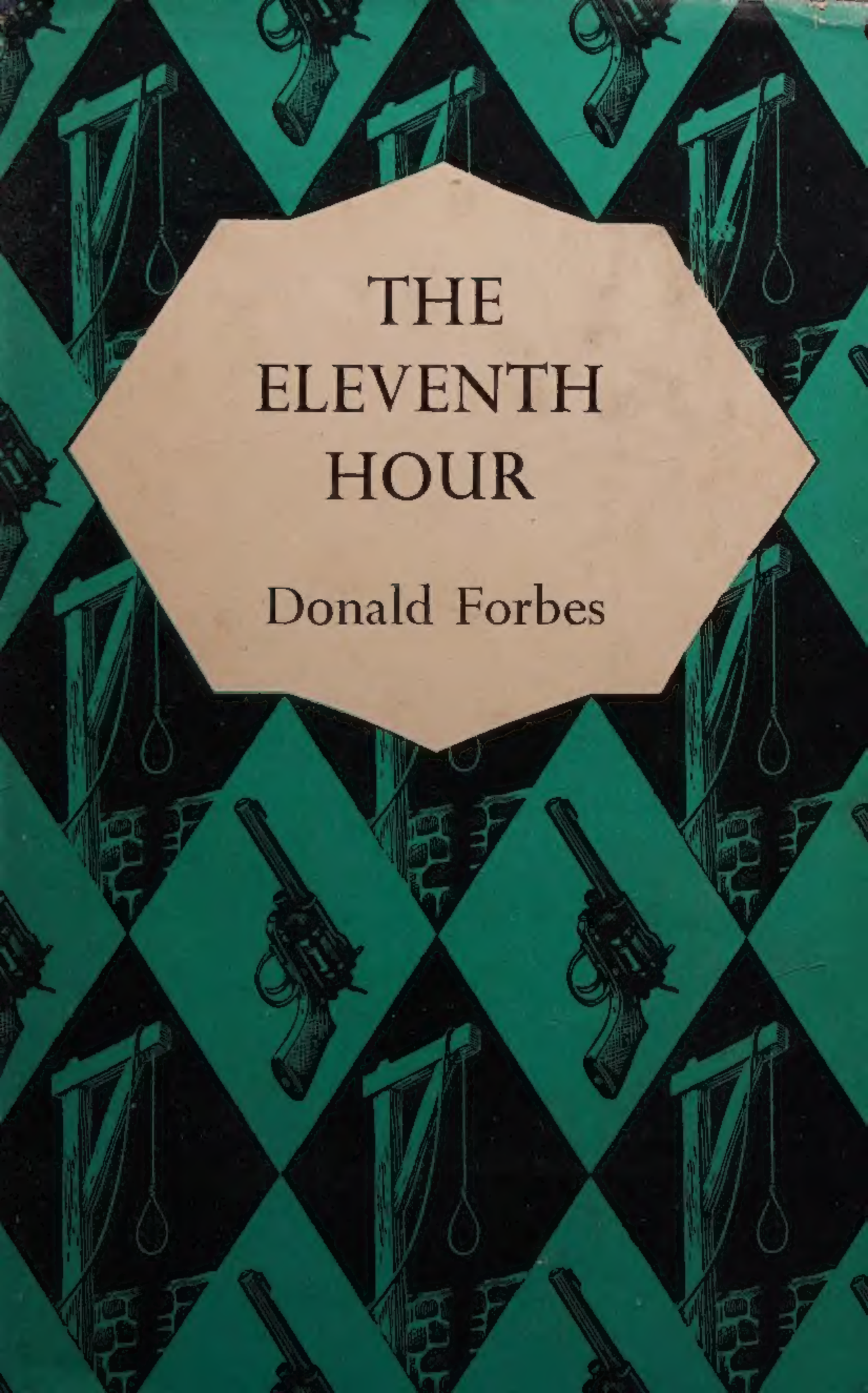

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

Donald Forbes

What can it mean—the solitary footprint on the deserted beach? Is it a fugitive, a smuggler, or a spy who has landed so furtively at this lonely spot on the coast of Norfolk? The coastguard, puzzled at his discovery, reports it to the police, though he little realizes the sinister nature of the mystery which lies behind it. It is for Inspector Gregory of Scotland Yard to piece together the swift, perplexing events which follow in another part of the country and to connect them at last with this one strange clue. Readers will be as anxious as he is to find out what lies behind the seemingly motiveless attack on Mr. Ogilvy, director of the Bath and Bristol Precision Instrument Company — the disappearance of the night-watchman—the rifling of a locked desk—and, finally, the attempt to break into the works.

"Those who like a story that always moves and finishes with its threads neatly tied will certainly find their meat here."

Manchester Evening News

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THE ELEVENTH HOUR

A NOVEL BY

DONALD FORBES

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CHAPTER I

THE STRANGER

JAMES RIDD, the coastguard in charge of the little station on Old Point, leaned over the stone wall at the foot of his garden and puffed contentedly at his pipe. To a west-countryman, the ways of these up-country folk had seemed strange when first he came to Old Point; but they were kindly, open-hearted people, and now he blessed the day on which he had been given this job, for his Service pension was very slender.

Between his garden wall and the edge of the low cliff, the rough tussock grass was stirred by the soft breath of a little evening breeze, cool and refreshing after the heat of a brilliant, cloudless day of early June.

He gazed out reflectively to the eastward, where the deep blue summer dusk had fallen across the sea, and where the lights of the fishing fleet burned clear and steadily inshore of the lightship marking the extremity of the Haiswold Sand. The fishermen from the little sea-port down the coast were hardy men, and Ridd admired them. He had seen enough of heavy weather himself, and when he watched those lights standing out to sea in the winter gales he felt profoundly thankful for the warm fire on the hearth in his cottage.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and was turning to go indoors when he paused: subconsciously he had noticed something unusual about the fishermen. Something odd was happening to their lights. Down in the south they were vanishing one by one as a slow ripple of darkness passed up the little fleet.

He watched with awakened interest, and as his memory travelled back across the years he realized that he had seen something like it before, during his service in the Navy. A darkened ship which showed no lights at all must be passing inshore of the fishing fleet, and covering their lights as she

passed. He focused his telescope on the dark patch, but it told him no more than he already knew.

It was very odd, he reflected. The destroyers from Harwich sometimes came this way, but it was most unlikely they would exercise inshore of the Haiswold, especially during the inshore fishing season.

He refilled his pipe and waited. Whatever it might be, this was something unusual, and therefore worth watching. Presently the unknown ship would draw clear of the fishing craft and then, with no lights to dazzle him, he might be able to make out the lines of her hull.

The lights of the last fisherman vanished, and then burned bright again, and James Ridd levelled his telescope once more. He still could not make her out; she was just a darker smudge on the surface of the sea. He could only tell that she was a small vessel, perhaps three miles off shore, and that in the ordinary course of events he would never have sighted her.

An uneasy suspicion began to form in his mind. Nobody, he thought, could accuse him of being an imaginative man; yet there was still plenty of smuggling on the east and south coasts, and The Flats, about four miles north of his station, had a great smuggling reputation in olden days, so he'd heard.

Long ago, he supposed, The Flats must have been a little estuary, which had slowly silted up. Now it was no more than a sandy bay, perhaps half a mile across, cut by a little stream slipping lazily across the sand and pebbles to the sea. Inland the country stretched away flat and marshy for three miles or more, its only firm path winding through the reeds. It was an isolated stretch of country, and difficult of access from the landward side except to those who knew the path well. The firm sandy beach of the bay, which would make boatwork easy, was covered at high tide. Yes, he thought, it was a good place for smuggling; and this was a good time, for it was half tide now, and flooding.

James Ridd, his mind made up, crossed the garden and entered his cottage.

"Mary," he called to his wife, "I'm going for a walk. Don't wait up for me. I may be late."

He slipped his pipe in his pocket, and set off along the path over the low sandy cliffs. He knew this path well; it was

easy going in the bright starlight, and his stride covered the ground swiftly and without effort.

As he walked, he reflected that he had probably set out on a wild-goose chase; but no matter, there would be no harm done, and it was his job to make sure. It would take him an hour to reach the bay. The unknown ship, if she was making for the same place, would probably take no more than twenty minutes. But she would not be likely to close within about a mile of the shore: then she would have to lower a boat, say five minutes, and load it with whatever or whoever was to be landed, say another five minutes: then it would take perhaps ten minutes to reach the shore, or longer if it was not a power boat: say three-quarters of an hour all told. If anything unlawful was afoot, it seemed to Ridd that he was likely to arrive at an interesting time.

The sea stretched away dark and empty to his right, and beneath him he could hear the soft and regular surge of the incoming tide. There was no further sign of the darkened ship, and he began to feel rather foolish, for he might have been comfortably in bed by this time. But the north star burned steadily ahead of him and beckoned him onwards. He did not know many of the stars by name, but the north star had always been his friend. There was something so sure and certain about it; you always knew where to look for it, and it never failed you.

At length the sandy path bore away from the cliff, to the left and down; and here James Ridd reduced his pace and turned off amongst the dunes on his right hand towards the edge of the cliff, where he sank down on hands and knees so as not to be silhouetted against the sky.

Just before him the cliff dropped sheer, and looking to the northward he could now see the form of the bay, with its thin crescent of silvery sand washed by the tide, and the low-lying lands of The Flats inshore. Across the bay there was the dark loom of rising ground, and cliffs again.

He strained eyes and ears for sight or sound of man, but the bay and the beach seemed to be deserted. Then to seaward he saw something that looked like a faint phosphorescent streak upon the water. He looked hard, and lost it; and then he saw it again. He gazed at it in some perplexity. It might be nothing, and probably was nothing; yet experience told

him that it could be the bow-wave or stern-wash of a power boat. The night was very still, and he listened intently, but he could hear no sound of engines. The streak was fainter now, and he kept losing sight of it: he thought it was farther out to sea.

He had only the most slender grounds for suspicion, yet he knew that if he went home now, without first going down to the beach to investigate, he would never sleep that night. There was something odd about the darkened ship that had passed inshore of the Haiswold; and if the phosphorescent streak he had seen was not the wash of a small power boat, then he could not in any way account for it. He must be careful, though, for he was alone, and if anything unlawful was afoot there would be more than one man down there on the sands.

He crept away from the cliff and regained the path, and cautiously followed it down towards the bay. He was aware of an unpleasant tingling of the scalp, for there was no cover, and he knew that anyone looking up the path would see him. Should he creep down on hands and knees, he wondered? No, it would take him too long, and, moreover, he would feel so supremely foolish when he arrived on the beach and found no one there. He must walk on, and be as quiet as he could, and trust to the probability that smugglers would not come this way but would use the path which ran inland.

The path swung right-handed, and he found himself no more than thirty yards from the sands. Here he sank down again, and for long minutes stared into the darkness, and listened; but there was no sign of movement on the shore, nor of a boat approaching the beach again.

He did not like the thought of his next move: but he could not lie there all night, and he must complete the job he had given himself. He must cross that half mile strip of sand before the incoming tide could wash away all footprints: and as there was not the smallest hope of concealing himself out there on the sand, he might just as well hurry up and do it openly.

James Ridd scrambled to his feet, gripped his empty pipe between his teeth, and set off stoically across the sand; and half way across, he saw what he had not really expected to find. With a horrid conviction that he was being watched he

paused and examined the print of the bare foot which lay before him. It was the print of a man's foot, a man who had landed from the sea this tide, and whose traces would be taken by the tide within the hour. One man had landed, and none had gone back.

He matched the footprint with his own boot, size nine: then he straightened himself and walked on again, his brain working swiftly as he steadily crossed the narrowing strip of sand. Could he catch the stranger? Probably not, for the man had a long start, and could be well on his way through The Flats by this time, beyond any chance of overtaking. On the other hand, if he was lying in concealment in the reeds, then he, James Ridd, would never find him until daylight came. How long was it since the man had landed? Perhaps it was half an hour. If he was following the tortuous path through the reeds it would take him at least another half hour to reach the road, and probably longer. James Ridd, if he hastened, could reach the telephone in his cottage in three-quarters of an hour. He realized that he must give the alarm, so that the police patrols could watch the roads: if the stranger was not seen that night, they could close in and search The Flats and the surrounding district at daylight.

He found that he had already reached the far side of the bay without making any fresh discoveries, and now he turned swiftly homewards. Back in his cottage, he took off the telephone receiver and put through a call to his District Officer.

. . . . . .

Detective Inspector Daniel Gregory laid down the reports he had been reading and leaned back in his chair, lost in meditation. On the whole he liked the Home Office security work on which he was engaged, for it held little of routine, and provided a wide variety of problems which gave full scope to a man's intelligence. Some of the problems, however, seemed to lead nowhere, and the reports he had just been reading were a fairly good example of this.

Three nights previously an unknown man had landed at an isolated place on the east coast called The Flats, under circumstances that left no doubt that he was 'wanted' by Scotland Yard for inquiry if for nothing else. The news of his

landing had been given with astonishing promptness by some fellow in the Coastguard, and it had been acted on with commendable speed by the police: but an exhaustive and sustained search of two counties had yielded not a single clue as to the identity, movements, whereabouts or purpose of the stranger. Wherefore it seemed clear that he had been met by a fast car at the head of The Flats and left the area before ever the police patrols set watch on the roads. If that was so, this particular case did indeed seem to lead nowhere; or rather, it led to the whole of Britain and its fifty million inhabitants amongst whom the stranger was now lost, and that amounted to the same thing.

Yet Gregory knew that to a man of intelligence the case must lead somewhere, for that fellow would never have landed at The Flats in the way he did without some very good, or rather bad, motive. He wondered if he could divine the motive, for that should lead him to the stranger; and he wondered if time was a matter of great importance.

He filled and lit his pipe, and then he pressed the bell for Sergeant Woodbridge.

The sergeant, a large and cheerful man who possessed a great deal of shrewd common sense, came in carrying a sheaf of papers.

Gregory ran his hand over his once dark hair, in which to his annoyance grey was beginning to predominate, and tapped the papers already lying on his desk.

"No thank you, Woodbridge," he said. "I've enough here for the moment. I suppose there's no fresh news from the Norfolk or Suffolk police about that fellow who landed at The Flats the other night?"

"Nothing fresh, sir," said the sergeant. "But you'll see from the reports that inquiries are still going on."

The inspector got up and walked over to the window, where he stared down into the street, apparently lost in contemplation of the traffic. The sergeant gazed with respect at the breadth of shoulder of the stocky figure at the window, and marvelled afresh that the inspector kept so physically fit when his office desk claimed so much of his day.

"Between you and me, Woodbridge," said the inspector at length, "if inquiries in Norfolk and Suffolk have produced nothing yet, they never will. But we can look at it from a

different angle up here. We've got all sorts of information which the County Police have not. Have you any ideas on the matter yourself?"

Privately the sergeant took what he believed to be the practical view, that unless the stranger gave them a new lead it was a waste of time to consider the matter any further. There was plenty of other work clamouring for attention, and all of it more likely to give results. But an answer on those lines was clearly not expected.

"Frankly no, sir," he replied. "It's like looking for a needle in a haystack. Only it's worse, because we don't even know what kind of needle we are looking for."

"You're wrong about that," said Gregory quietly. "We really know quite a lot about the needle; and we can deduce a lot more, though we'll come to that later. We know it's a man, not a woman; and we know it's an ordinary man with ordinary sized feet, not a very big man nor a very little one, nor apparently one who is lame. I admit that still leaves us a pretty wide choice, but we've already cut out more than half of the millions in the kingdom. Now what else do we know?"

"Well, sir, we know that it's a very odd way to come ashore. It's not difficult to pass the Customs and Immigration authorities on the Cross-Channel boats; plenty of undesirables have come that way before, and I've no doubt plenty more will unless the regulations are tightened up."

"Exactly; it is an odd way to come ashore. It's film stuff, melodrama, not common sense. It's important, too, because there's money behind it, money and brains and organization. You cannot arrive in a darkened steamer without money, however small the steamer may be. It might make sense if it was a case of smuggling, but it wasn't."

Woodbridge looked at him curiously. "Are we sure of that, sir?" he asked.

"I am," said Gregory, "quite sure. Only one man was landed, and one man cannot carry enough dutiable goods to justify such a journey in a darkened steamer."

"One man can carry a lot of drugs, sir, at least a lot in value," objected Sergeant Woodbridge.

"I grant you that," said Gregory, "but it doesn't fit this case. A man who could afford to own or charter the steamer

wouldn't be content to land such drugs as one man could carry; he would land a great deal more."

"In that case," said Sergeant Woodbridge promptly, "the fellow must be someone who is already 'wanted', who suspects that the Port Authorities would be watching for him and would recognize him if he crossed from the Continent in the ordinary way."

"Yes, I think you are right, except that he may not be 'wanted' officially. He may simply wish to conceal his arrival in this country because he knows we'd take grave exception to his presence amongst us and would watch him, even though we had no grounds either to apprehend him or keep him out. Anyway, that reduces our list of possibles to much more reasonable proportions. Now then, who would wish to avoid the Port Authorities?"

"A criminal from the Continent who's on the run, sir. I can make you a list of possibles, and it won't be a long one, for a man who's in a big enough way to own or charter a small steamer very seldom runs."

"Yes, very seldom: and generally speaking people on the run go to the Continent, not from it. It's not so easy to get out of this island as it is to cross a frontier, and once a fellow's out of here he'd be wiser to stay out. Now what about political agitators? They come in and don't go out, for they've more freedom for subversive activities here than anywhere else."

Sergeant Woodbridge wrinkled his brows. "That's not so easy, sir, for there must be plenty of agitators we shouldn't be anxious to see in this country. Would you like a list of the specimens we'd particularly not like over here just at present?"

"Yes please; and again the field is really quite limited, because we assume we are looking for a man we know by sight, and to whom we've probably taken exception already. When I've looked through your two lists we may be able to send out a general warning."

The inspector paused, staring down at the traffic surging past the building. He watched fascinated, as a boy on a bicycle blithely twisted his way into safety from between an omnibus and a brewer's dray.

"You know," he said with a whimsical smile, "I'd rather look for a needle in a haystack than be one of our fellows down there on traffic duty. But going back to our needle,

there are two more categories into which he might fall. The fellow may be an Intelligence Agent; though why the devil we should call a spy by a grand name like that baffles me. Anyway, he may be a spy."

"Then I doubt if there's much we can do, sir," said Woodbridge reflectively, "until he makes another move."

"No, not much, I agree. But I'll have a talk with the three Defence Ministries on the private line. One of them might give us a clue as to what the fellow's after, and there may be some special security precautions that we ought to take."

The inspector turned away from the window, and walked back to his desk.

"Finally," he said, "it may be a fellow who's at present quite innocent, but who has come to this country especially to commit some crime such as murder or theft. He's covered his arrival, and if he covers his departure in the same way he has the perfect alibi, for ostensibly he's never been in the country at all and so never comes under suspicion. But I confess that I cannot see anything we can do about a man like that, for we cannot possibly divine his intention. Anyway, let me have those two lists of yours as quickly as you can, will you?" he concluded, as he picked up a green telephone instrument.

CHAPTER II

A MATTER OF BUSINESS

THE Bath & Bristol Precision Instrument Company is an old established firm of very high standing. Their works are not extensive, for neither the instruments which they make nor the machinery required for the making are large; but the quality of their workmanship has been renowned for many years, and a great quantity of delicate apparatus, both electrical and mechanical, passes out through the gates of their yard.

At midday on the 11th June, Mr. James Ogilvy, the Managing Director, was seated at his desk reading two letters. One of them had been received many months previously, and in this letter the paragraph which now attracted his attention ran as follows:

> "Their Lordships anticipate that, in the event of successful trials, they will wish to place an order for extensive production of the apparatus for early installation in Her Majesty's Fleet."

The other letter, only three days' old, was written by Ryder's, and in asking Mr. Ogilvy to give an early appointment to Mr. Brancaster, they quoted the Admiralty letter as a reference. Mr. Ogilvy assumed that Brancaster wished to discuss the question of 'extensive production', for the two firms had no other common ground in the making of the apparatus: Mr. Ogilvy, for his part, considered that any such discussion would be premature.

He wondered what Brancaster was like. At present he only knew him by repute as a brilliant electrical engineer and the driving force behind the firm of John Ryder & Company, the big engineers in the north midlands. He took his watch from his pocket, and saw that he had not much longer to wait. Indeed, he could already hear muffled voices in his secretary's office next door, and he laid down the two letters as Miss

Ferris opened the communicating door and stood aside to announce Mr. Adrian Brancaster.

Mr. Ogilvy saw coming into the room a man very different from himself, a young man, probably still under forty, tall, broad shouldered and lean, with a good jaw and steady, level grey eyes. Mr. Ogilvy suddenly felt very withered and threadbare, but his own blue eyes were alert and shrewd as ever as he got up and held out a hand in welcome.

"Thank you, Margaret dear," said Brancaster with a smile as he passed Miss Ferris. His voice was like the rest of him, quiet and friendly, but clearly used to command. He stepped forward to meet Mr. Ogilvy.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, sir," said Brancaster respectfully to the older man. "I've already renewed one friendship here, for I met your very charming secretary on one of the cruising liners three years ago."

Mr. Ogilvy saw his visitor comfortably settled in an armchair with a cigarette, and then he came straight to the point.

"I understand," he said, "that your visit is concerned with the Admiralty apparatus which our two firms have been making."

"That is correct," answered Brancaster. "We have, in fact, begun to consider the question of full scale production of it. Perhaps you have done the same?"

"Yes," said Mr. Ogilvy slowly, "but only in very general terms. It's been my experience that new apparatus such as this, involving new principles, is seldom ready to go into production after its first trials."

"I agree," said Brancaster, "but there are special circumstances which affect my firm, and I'm bound to assume that the sea trials, which I believe are due in two or three weeks' time, will be successful." He watched a smoke ring as it slowly spiralled to the ceiling and dispersed: he seemed to be choosing his words. "I want to sign another important contract," he went on at length. "But I don't want to do so until I know my capacity to handle it, and that depends on the extent to which the Admiralty work engages our resources."

"I see," said Mr. Ogilvy in a non-committal tone. "Under the circumstances that makes things rather difficult, doesn't it?"

"Not very," said Brancaster with a smile. "Obviously I'm bound to assume that we start Admiralty production next month, and limit my other commitments accordingly: it's the only prudent thing I can do. Now, having put my cards on the table, I'm coming to the point. My machines for the Admiralty are no use without your modulator panels, and the reverse is equally true. I don't want to clog my works with an unnecessary number of Admiralty machines, and you no doubt will feel the same about your panels. I feel we ought to co-operate so far as the peculiar terms of the Admiralty contracts allow us, and balance our production, the one firm against the other. In fact, I've come to tell you our productivity capacity of the gear, and to ask if you will tell me yours. If the Admiralty gives the order as soon as the trials are over, I can start deliveries in October at the rate of forty sets of machines each month, but naturally I've no wish to turn out so many if, for example, you can only supply twenty panels."

"Forty sets a month," mused Mr. Ogilvy, but it was plain that his mind was not on his words, for he drummed a restless tattoo on the desk with his fingers, and gazed through the open window with eyes which clearly saw nothing. He was thinking deeply. He had realized all along that he and Brancaster must one day come to an understanding to their mutual benefit, but he had previously shelved the question as insoluble until such time as the apparatus successfully passed its trials at sea. However, it would perhaps be as well if something was now decided. He could not match Brancaster's forty deliveries a month, nor anything like it. Very well, suppose that, as a result, Brancaster cut down deliveries to twenty, would the Admiralty continue to accept Mr. Ogilvy's twenty-five? They might to begin with, but surely not as the months rolled by and a great stock of unused modulator panels began to build up. If Brancaster could match Mr. Ogilvy's output of twenty-five, all would be well, but suppose economic production in his works demanded either twenty or forty, what then? If Brancaster set the level at twenty and Mr. Ogilvy fell into line, then the spare productivity capacity of the Bath & Bristol might well be diverted to the highly profitable Wilberforce & Marling contract.

Meanwhile Brancaster sat smoking quietly. There was

nothing to be gained by hustling Mr. Ogilvy, and he felt sure that with patience he would achieve his goal.

"You must understand," said Mr. Ogilvy at last, "that I am not committed to anything as yet. I must preserve the firm's freedom of action. Naturally I am prepared, like you, to switch over part of the firm's resources to the Admiralty work as soon as the order is given, but any forecast of production that I might give you would be very speculative. I believe that when Captain Manwaring was here (no doubt he visited your works too) I spoke tentatively of a production of twenty-five panels a month, but he was well aware that the figure was given without prejudice."

"I understand perfectly," said Brancaster. "But I think the principle of co-operation between us remains sound, don't you? For instance, if I have to scale down my deliveries below forty, there are certain other optimum figures of output; from the economic and business point of view, that is. No doubt you would have similar considerations. Would you mind telling me if your figure of twenty-five is based on an Admiralty order being given next month?"

"Ye-e-s," said Mr. Ogilvy hesitantly, "but it was a very tentative figure, given very long ago." He paused. "Aren't you being very optimistic as to the outcome of the trials?" he added.

Brancaster smiled. "Perhaps I am," he said. "Perhaps I've been infected by the enthusiasm of the sailors themselves. They all seem very confident."

"Yes, at least young Dryden does. He's been very helpful here, too," mused Mr. Ogilvy. Would the trials satisfy the Admiralty? he was wondering. He was confident his modulator panel would meet the demands made upon it, and no doubt Brancaster could say the same of his machines. But would the sailors find no modification desirable so as to make a good thing even better? They usually did. However there *was* a chance that the order would be given next month, and if so, what then? On the figure of twenty-five, Brancaster had been as non-committal as Mr. Ogilvy himself, but perhaps he was simply sparring. Could Jimmy economically regulate the work in the Bath & Bristol so as to deliver, for example, either twenty or thirty panels a month? Mr. Ogilvy doubted it. Jimmy was a good lad. He'd have planned the work in the

shops to the best advantage when he gave his estimate of twenty-five, and there was usually only one best way of doing things. But circumstances might have changed, and it might yet be possible to adjust the output of panels to the financial benefit of the Bath & Bristol.

"I'll see what my Works Manager has to say about it," said Mr. Ogilvy at last, and he picked up the house-telephone and spoke briefly into it.

James Muir, the Works Manager, was a young man for whom Mr. Ogilvy had considerable regard, but as he now stepped into the director's office Mr. Ogilvy was aware of another sharp contrast with Brancaster, and again a contrast which was not at all in favour of the Bath & Bristol. Jimmy Muir, lanky and cadaverous with an untidy thatch of black hair looked even more dishevelled and saturnine than usual. Mr. Ogilvy introduced the two men, and was interested to notice the mutual respect in the eyes of two such different personalities.

"Jimmy," said Mr. Ogilvy, "if we get an order next month to start work on the Admiralty panels, what will be our monthly output?"

"Twenty-five," said Muir briefly.

"And when would we start deliveries?"

"Production takes ten weeks," said Muir.

Mr. Ogilvy turned to Brancaster. "Our tentative figure appears to hold good," he said.

"So I see," said Brancaster. "Then the question is, can I adjust the output of my machines to meet yours? And the answer is, not economically. I suppose you couldn't raise your output to thirty?"

"What about it, Jimmy? Would it be possible?"

"It might be, sir, but I shouldn't like it," said Muir bluntly.

Mr. Ogilvy saw, with regret, the obstinate set of Muir's jaw. He had no intention of forcing Muir's hand, for his opinion was not lightly to be ignored: on the other hand, he was not prepared to be outfaced in his own office in the presence of Brancaster.

"What is the main difficulty, Jimmy?" he asked.

"It's a job for Evan Davies," said Muir. "His shop had all the important instruments in the four panels we made for trial, and he cannot turn out more than twenty-five."

"I see." Mr. Ogilvy examined the point of a pencil with minute care. "I suppose it wouldn't be possible for Williams or Davey to take some of the instruments in their shops instead? There'd be plenty of time to organize it, Jimmy."

"It wouldn't be as good as having the whole thing under one man," said Muir. Then he added, grudgingly, "Can I see the blue prints again to refresh my memory?"

Mr. Ogilvy took from his pocket a bunch of keys at the end of a heavy silver chain. He walked across to an old-fashioned safe mounted on the wall behind his desk, and opened it with a large, old-fashioned key. From the few papers which the safe contained he selected a roll of blue prints and handed it to Muir.

"You'd better look at them in here, Jimmy," he said. "Spread them out on the table by the door. I might want to see them too."

"Can I send for Davies?" asked Muir. "I'd like his opinion."

Brancaster meanwhile had sauntered over to the window, and was idly gazing at the inviting blue sky which showed above the roof tops. There he was joined by Mr. Ogilvy, who engaged him in desultory conversation whilst Muir and Davies, the shop foreman, bent their heads over the blue prints.

"It's curious that you should know my secretary," said Mr. Ogilvy. "Where did you say you met her?"

"On board the *Stella Procyon*, cruising in the Mediterranean," answered Brancaster. "It's a pleasant way of avoiding the worst of our winter. Have you tried it?"

Mr. Ogilvy smiled and shook his head. "I'm afraid I don't find much time to travel," he said.

"Well, I don't know that cruising is much in my line either," said Brancaster. "But that winter my doctor said I'd have to take a complete rest. I think I'd been overdoing it during the war, and I'd never really let up since peace broke out, either. It was certainly the most restful experience that I can recall."

"It's odd," said Mr. Ogilvy, whose only excursion from his own shores had been a long-forgotten honeymoon in Brittany, "to think of that child seeing places that I have never seen. Why, she can scarcely have been grown up three years ago. Who was she travelling with? She's no near relatives that I've ever heard of."

"She was travelling with some well-to-do friends. I believe her mother had just died. I remember Margaret once showed me a photograph of her. She had the same fair hair and small features and must have been just as attractive as Margaret herself when she was young."

"Yes," said Mr. Ogilvy vaguely, for he had never noticed it, "Miss Ferris is a good-looking child."

A knock on the door announced the arrival of Margaret Ferris herself, a slim, cool figure in cotton frock and light blue cardigan, who obviously thrived on the blazing June weather.

"Mr. Walter Danbury is on the telephone, sir," said Miss Ferris. "He's asking if you and Mrs. Ogilvy would care to have an early supper with him this evening before the election meeting; if so, he would take you on to the meeting in his car."

"Thank you, Miss Ferris. Will you tell him I'll be delighted? I'm sure my wife will be glad to come to supper too, though I know she won't come on to the meeting." He turned to Brancaster. "Do you know Danbury?" he asked. "He's the owner and editor of our paper, *Straightforward*. I don't suppose *Straightforward* has any sales in Mantringham, though."

"As a matter of fact it has," said Brancaster. "I should think it first appeared in Mantringham about a year ago. I've met Danbury too, more than once. I remember I sat next to him at some public dinner in your sister city, and I liked him."

Brancaster was suddenly aware that the quiet murmur of conversation from the far side of the room had ceased, and glancing towards the table where Muir and the shop foreman were at work, he saw that Muir had turned his head and that his face wore an expression of the most malevolent disapproval.

"Danbury could be a great man if he chose," said Mr. Ogilvy. "I wish we could get him to join our Party, but if ever he stood for Parliament it would be as an Independent."

"Yes, I imagine it would," said Brancaster, rather absent-mindedly. "Yes, I imagine so." He was wondering what was the cause of the violent emotion he had surprised on Muir's face.

"Fortunately," went on Mr. Ogilvy happily, "he's come down firmly on the right side this time. He's speaking on the

platform tonight in support of our candidate. Have you ever heard him speak?"

"No, I can't say that I have. He's good, is he?"

"Oh, wonderful: a natural orator who doesn't need any of the tricks. You won't be in the city tonight, I suppose? If you are, you should come to the meeting."

"I'm afraid I've got to go back this afternoon," said Brancaster. "But I might look him up in his office before catching my train. I'd quite like to see him again."

Mr. Ogilvy looked at his watch: its hands stood at a quarter to one.

"Well, Jimmy," he asked, "Have you any news for me yet?"

Muir straightened up and nodded his thanks to the shop foreman, who took his cap and quietly left the office.

"Nothing definite," said Muir. "At least two of the machines in Williams' shop will have to be re-tooled. If we do that, I think we can raise the output to thirty. I can tell you definitely in a couple of days' time."

"Good man," said Mr. Ogilvy. "That will be without detriment to the work for Wilberforce and Marling, of course?"

"Of course," said Muir simply. He handed back the blue prints to Mr. Ogilvy, who locked them in the safe again.

"I've made a note of the rough cost of re-tooling the machines," continued Muir, studying a slip of paper he still held in his hand. "I expect you'd like it."

"Thank you, Jimmy." Mr. Ogilvy took the paper and glanced at the figures. "I'm pretty sure we can help each other, Mr. Brancaster," he said, "but I think I'll have to confirm it by letter when we've had more time to study the question."

"Naturally," said Brancaster. "That's quite understood."

Mr. Ogilvy pinned Muir's calculations to the two letters he had earlier been reading. Then, selecting a key from his ring, he opened a drawer in his desk and put them in. He had just relocked the drawer when Miss Ferris knocked and came into the office, closing the door behind her.

"Mr. van Arlberg has arrived, sir," she announced.

"Nonsense," exclaimed Mr. Ogilvy testily. "His appointment is this afternoon."

"Yes sir, but he says his appointment is at twelve-forty-five," said Miss Ferris.

"Rubbish," snapped Mr. Ogilvy. "I said two-forty-five, not twelve-forty-five. Anyway, I can't see him now. I'm just taking Mr. Brancaster out to lunch."

"Yes sir," said Miss Ferris, doggedly holding her ground. "Mr. van Arlberg says he's got to leave the city directly after lunch."

"I'm so sorry about this," said the quiet voice of Brancaster from the window, "but perhaps I can suggest a way out of the difficulty. I was very much looking forward to lunch with you, sir, but these things happen, and business has to go on. May I instead have the pleasure of taking your secretary out to lunch with me? It would be nice on a hot day like this to talk of blue days at sea and the snow glittering on the Sierra Nevada," he added smilingly to Miss Ferris.

Margaret Ferris's face lit up with pleasure, and she coloured prettily as she looked towards Mr. Ogilvy for approval. Mr. Ogilvy, for his part, looked profoundly relieved as he rose and took Brancaster by the hand.

"That's very good of you," he said. "I shall miss your company, but as it happens my business with Mr. van Arlberg is rather important. I'll be delighted to let Miss Ferris go with you. I shan't need her any more this morning."

James Muir, his face sulphurous and inscrutable, piloted Brancaster out into the passage, whilst Miss Ferris returned to the door of her own office and opened it.

"Mr. van Arlberg," she announced, standing aside to admit a middle-aged, swarthy man with a little dark pointed beard, who stepped forward to greet Mr. Ogilvy.

Crossing to her desk, Miss Ferris glanced swiftly through a file of duplicates. She found what she wanted, and wrinkling her nose in a little grimace, she slipped out of her office and joined Brancaster in the passage.

CHAPTER III

LUNCH FOR TWO

As they stepped into the sunlit street, Brancaster became aware of the wonderful improvement three years had brought to the already attractive girl he had known before. There was something indescribably cool and fresh and complete about Margaret Ferris. From the clear grey eyes and small but determined chin, to the little feet in their neat red court shoes, there was a sense of perfection, a feeling that nothing could be altered without spoiling the picture.

For a few moments he walked beside her in silence, marvelling as the sunlight called a hint of bronze from the fair curls which showed beneath the gay little scarf. Three years ago there had still been something of the schoolgirl about Margaret Ferris: maturity had brought improvement to something which even then had seemed perfect.

"If," asked Brancaster cheerfully, "someone had told you three years ago that today you and I would be having lunch together in a great big city like this, would you have believed them?"

"No," smiled Margaret, "I don't think I should." She began to say something more, but checked herself and coloured.

Brancaster looked at her severely. "I think," he said, "that you were about to call me 'Mr. Brancaster'. No, don't tell me. If you say you weren't, I shan't believe you: and if you say you were, I shall send you back to Mr. Ogilvy with a report of insolence."

Margaret coloured again, but this time laughed aloud. "Adrian," she said, "you haven't changed a bit. Why have they made you a Managing Director, when you've never grown up?"

"It's a reward," said Brancaster solemnly, "a reward for old age and grey hairs." He looked at the girl critically.

"I should think," he went on, "it will be at least a year before you are qualified for similar promotion."

"You're incorrigible," she said decidedly, taking him by the arm and piloting him across the busy street. "Come on. You may be giving me lunch, but you don't know our city. We're going to Menotti's."

Inside the restaurant it seemed cool and dim after the glare of the streets. They chose a secluded table near the small orchestra, and Brancaster watched appreciatively as the girl turned and hung up her light camel-hair coat and shook free her curls from the imprisoning scarf. He had often thought of Margaret Ferris since those warm, balmy days in the Mediterranean, and the sight of her now reawakened an ancient torment. Now that he had found her again, dared he hope that, despite their great difference of age, she might one day link her future with his own? Could he, with Margaret, find happiness and peace, and forgetfulness of the anguish which, many years ago, had embittered his whole life? A lonely man's vision of his world as it might have been suddenly opened up before him, and for a moment he was aware of a numbing chill. Then he realized that Margaret was holding out the menu the waiter had given her.

"Adrian," she said gaily, "you're day-dreaming. What is t? Visions of your romantic past?"

"Something like that," he answered lightly. "But tell me, Miss Secretary Ferris, are you happy in this job of yours?"

Margaret raised a warning finger.

"Hush!" she said. "I tell you, Mr. Director Brancaster, that I'm a *bad* secretary, at least I used to be. But I'm getting better, quite a crook, in fact."

Brancaster grinned. "The question is," he said, "does it take a good crook to be a good secretary, or is it the other way about? Are you far advanced in the art of crookery."

"I don't know." Her mood of banter had dropped. "Adrian, I feel such a pig, sometimes. Just now, for instance, it was my fault about that little man who came. I typed twelve-forty-five on the letter by mistake, I looked up our file copy before I came out to lunch. I ought to tell Mr. Ogilvy, because nowadays he trusts me in that sort of way. But I shan't tell him, I've given up telling him when I make mistakes like that, because he makes *such* a fuss." Her eyes had taken on a look

Brancaster remembered: she was the school-girl again, looking to the wise elder brother for guidance. "Is it very awful of me, Adrian?" she asked.

"Not very, my dear," said Brancaster with a smile, "so long as you still manage to feel awful about it!" He gently led the talk away from an awkward subject. "Tell me, how did you come to take this job?"

"Oh, you remember those nice people, the Ellisons, who took me on the cruise in the *Stella Procyon*? After the cruise they paid for my secretarial course too. They've been awfully kind."

"And you came here straight after your course? Margaret, you've been very lucky, or else you're a far better secretary than you'll ever admit."

"Oh no, I didn't come straight to the Bath and Bristol, and I was scared stiff when I did. I had a probationary job first, as assistant secretary to an old dragon of a woman in the Ministry of something-or-other. And then Miss Marlowe died."

"And who was Miss Marlowe?" asked Brancaster, mystified.

"Oh, didn't I explain? Well, Miss Marlowe was the old thing who was Mr. Ogilvy's secretary ever since anyone can remember. It seems she practically ran the firm. But I gather she was rather a dear, really."

Some slight change in the girl's tone registered in Brancaster's quick brain.

"You know, Margaret," he said, "the old secretary, thirty years with the firm and all that sort of thing, is a very privileged person. I should think my own secretary probably knows more about Ryder's business than I do, at all events she's years older than me. But the young generation mustn't expect quite the same privilege and trust to begin with."

"Oh, I know all that," said Margaret impatiently, "and I know I'm lucky to be where I am. As a matter of fact it was the Principal of the school who got me the job when Miss Marlowe died, and Mr. Ogilvy's been very long-suffering to let me stay. I was dreadfully ignorant of business ways, Adrian, and for months I felt an absolute blot on the face of the Bath and Bristol, and a pretty temporary blot at that. Is it wrong of me to talk like this? I suppose it is, but somehow it

doesn't seem to be when I'm talking to you. Oh, I've heard so much of 'Miss Marlowe did this' and 'Miss Marlowe did that', and I'm just about sick of it. I'm doing my best, and yet I'm not even allowed to handle the keys of the safe or the desk, of which the great Miss Marlowe apparently had full freedom."

Brancaster leaned across the table and gently took her hand.

"It's very natural, my dear," he said quietly. "These old firms are very conservative in their ways. My own is just the same. We get used to people, and we find any change in our ways rather shattering. I expect Miss Marlowe was here for years and years before she had the freedom of the director's safe, indeed it's a freedom my own secretary hasn't got even now. If you stayed long enough with the firm, Margaret, you'd be given the same trust. But of course you won't stay long, for one of these days you'll be making a home for some very fortunate man."

Margaret's eyes clouded, and she fell silent. For the moment she felt safe and secure, and she thought she could always feel like that with Adrian: he was so sure of himself, and so wise. But this was a very brief moment of security. Soon Adrian's train would be carrying him back to Mantringham, and in her mind she could already hear the swift exultant song of the wheels, clickety-clack, clickety-clack, clickety-clack as they spurned the miles behind them, leaving her to resolve her own doubts and fears with no one to guide her. She realized that Adrian was speaking to her.

"Where are you living now, Margaret?" he was asking.

"Oh, I've a room in a girl's hostel," she answered rather vaguely. "There's about thirty of us live there. It's not bad really, but a bit catty sometimes."

"Margaret, my dear," he smiled, "I'm sure you've no need to depend on the hostel for friends. You must have heaps of admirers."

The girl flushed. "Oh, the young men around here are quite impossible," she snapped.

Brancaster looked at her curiously. "I claim the privilege of an elder brother," he said. "You've one admirer in your own works, my dear. I know that from the bleak look I was given when I took you out to lunch."

"Oh, poof." She tossed her head angrily. "You mean Mr. Muir, I suppose. If he'd have his hair cut he might be possible, provided of course that he could think of something better to talk about than his horrid nuts and bolts." Paradoxically, she promptly wished she could bite out her tongue.

"I'm sorry, Margaret," said Brancaster simply.

"Oh, you needn't be sorry, Adrian," said the girl, deliberately turning the knife in the wound. "Mr. Muir means nothing to me. The man's too jealous to live. He's been quite impossible ever since Charles Danbury took me to that dance, and it's ridiculous, anyway, because Charles doesn't mean any more to me than he does himself. Things have got so bad that he can't even stand the sight of Charles's father when he comes to see Mr. Ogilvy."

"I shouldn't let it worry you, my dear," he said. "You're young and the world is at your feet. There are lots of other young people, many of them nice, and a few of them worthy of you. Life wouldn't be worth while, Margaret, if it wasn't a bit of an adventure, and there's no adventure without its storms." He paused, and let his memory go back across the years. "Do you remember, my dear," he went on, "the morning we passed through the Straits? Do you remember that I found you on deck early, and that together we saw the soft colours of the dawn staining the sky behind distant Gibraltar? Do you remember, on the other side, the white buildings of Ceuta taking form through the haze, with the dim blue mystery of the Atlas Mountains beyond? We said we were crossing the threshold."

"Yes, I remember," said the girl softly. "We were crossing the threshold, and beyond lay the magic of the Mediterranean and life and adventure. Adrian, I wonder if you realized the thrill of it all, to me."

"Yes, my dear," he said gravely, "I knew. We were crossing the threshold, and that is just what we do when we grow up. We pass through the straits into a sea which is sometimes warm and blue and friendly, and sometimes cold and grey and tumultuous. That's what life is like, Margaret. It has calms and adventures and storms, and one cannot have one without the others, whether it's in one's work or play or friendships."

"I suppose you're right," said Margaret rather absently.

Her thoughts had travelled out to places which, in all the years ahead of her, she would probably never see again. Then as her hand idly crumbled a little piece of toast, she suddenly noticed her wrist-watch.

"Good gracious," she exclaimed, "I must fly, or Mr. Ogilvy will be back in his office before me. Adrian, it's been terribly nice to see you again—I do wish we could meet more often."

"So do I, my dear," he said. He hesitated a moment, and then pulled a card from his wallet and scribbled something on it, and handed it to her. "Margaret," he went on, "will you do something for me? That's my private telephone number in Mantringham. I'll be back in my flat by eight o'clock this evening, and won't be going out again. If Mr. Ogilvy knows the answer to the question I asked him this morning, perhaps you could give me a ring and let me know? I don't want to hurry Mr. Ogilvy in any way, but from my point of view the sooner I know the better."

Margaret Ferris returned to her office with a brain that was curiously disturbed and disordered, so that she irritated the methodical Mr. Ogilvy almost to a frenzy. In her mind she was once more far away, this time sitting in a north-bound train, listening blissfully to the rhythmic clickety-clack of the wheels and watching the profile of a man who, she was beginning to think, might mean more to her than an elder brother.

She was finally shocked out of her happy day dreams by the infuriating spectacle of Muir's tousled black head, and from that moment the practical side of her nature resumed charge of her affairs. Mr. Ogilvy had given her no satisfactory reason for telephoning Mantringham 75904, but surely Mr. Brancaster would wish at least to know that no decision had yet been reached. Surely she ought at least to tell him that, for otherwise he might sit up late, waiting for a telephone call that was not coming. Really, her duty seemed clear.

Brancaster, meanwhile, was leaning back in the corner of an otherwise empty carriage, gazing with unseeing eyes at the swiftly changing countryside which lay so serene in the mellow evening sunshine. The rhythmic clickety-clack of the wheels gradually deadened the torment of a mind that leaped

irresponsibly between the slim, fair girl he had just left, and the girl of many years ago, so tall and dark and so different. The mind would not hold the two together. One could as well compare the English dog-rose with the orchid, each so perfect in its own setting as to be incomparable.

Brancaster shook himself violently. He simply must cut out these torturing thoughts. Perhaps Margaret would telephone to him that night, he reflected; then again, perhaps she would not. There was something else about telephones he had meant to remember: what was it? Oh yes, of course, it was about Muir. Margaret had given him the answer to something that had puzzled him that morning. He had wondered at the malevolent glare on Muir's face when Margaret gave the telephone message from the elder Danbury. But of course, Charles Danbury and the dance; in Muir's eyes both son and father were tarred with the same brush.

CHAPTER IV

MR. OGILVY MEETS ADVENTURE

THE election meeting in St. Cedric's Hall was over. The colourless words of an indifferent candidate for the seat had been overlaid by a brilliant fighting speech from Walter Danbury, so that an otherwise dull and prosaic meeting had ended on a note of wild enthusiasm. Flushed with success, the organizers were gathered round the committee-room door, bidding good night to the candidate in a chorus of mutual congratulations, in which the candidate's own insignificant part in the triumph was forgotten.

The crowd in the doorway and on the pavement thinned, and Mr. Ogilvy found himself next to Danbury.

"Walter," he said, "we've all been congratulating that fellow Baxter on a triumph that was really yours. I suppose there's no chance that you'll abandon your independence and join the Party?"

"I'm afraid not," said Danbury with a smile. "I like my freedom, both for myself and for my paper. But any other time your people are talking sense, James, I'll be glad to help them again if I can. Where's that fellow Charles?" A tall, athletic-looking young man in the early twenties elbowed his way towards them. "Come on, Charles," said Danbury, "it's time we were getting home." He moved across the pavement towards his car, and then paused. "I suppose it's useless to offer you a lift home, James?" he called back to Mr. Ogilvy.

"Thank you, Walter, but I'll walk," said Mr. Ogilvy. "It will do me good."

For a while Mr. Ogilvy stayed chatting with the chairman and other members of the committee, and then he stepped out into the warm summer dusk. The sky had covered at sundown, but it was quite light, for a young moon was riding above the city's buildings and shone fitfully through the

scattered cloud which a light westerly breeze drove slowly before her face.

In refusing a lift home in Danbury's car, Mr. Ogilvy was merely conforming to habit. He had long ago realized the link between physical health and the mental clarity which his work at the Bath & Bristol required, and except for an occasional round of golf, walking was his only means of keeping fit. Thus it was that, in summer and in winter and in all weathers, his slight, wiry frame was to be seen each morning and evening covering on foot the mile and a half which separated his home from his works. St. Cedric's Hall lay not far beyond the works, and so it was the same familiar road which he would take that night. It would lead him first through brightly lit streets and thence, through a desolate stretch of the city's bombed area, to a land of quiet residential roads, in one of which his home and his wife were waiting for him.

As he walked, his mind dwelt upon the eventful meeting he had just left. In all his years he could remember no similar meeting which had ended so well after such an indifferent start, and that was entirely thanks to Walter Danbury. The sight of his erect and broad-shouldered figure on the platform, his composure and his quiet air of self-assurance, had all doubtless played their part: but it was the fire of youthful enthusiasm which burned so brightly within the man which had really tipped the scales. Mr. Ogilvy found himself beginning to wonder whether, indeed, his friend might ultimately prove to have done more harm than good, for his brilliance had mercilessly exposed the inadequacy of the actual candidate. It was very irritating of Walter, he reflected, that he would not settle down to orthodox politics. It was also rather odd, when one came to think of it, that Walter should be granted such talents and yet waste them through lack of ambition; and wasted they were, for they had no real outlet in a provincial newspaper. It was odd, too, that a man like Walter should in fact lack ambition; but then no two human natures were alike, and it was that which made the world such an interesting place to live in.

Mr. Ogilvy, head down and deep in thought, collided violently with a man walking in the opposite direction, and his apology was vague.

The collision did, however, shake up his train of thought, and he now found himself thinking of Brancaster, and in this there was something uncomfortable and disturbing. He was uneasily conscious of the fact that Brancaster, despite his friendliness and respect for an older man, had dominated the meeting in the works that morning. What was even more disturbing was the fact that Brancaster was absolutely right. Mr. Ogilvy had no belief that the Admiralty would place their order in the following month, but it was possible, and therefore there was no doubt that the two firms should be ready to go into immediate production on a mutually economic footing. It was a new and unpleasant experience to find himself to compare so unfavourably with the head of another firm as he had done that morning, and he had an ugly feeling that perhaps he was getting past his job. Anyway, it was satisfactory that Jimmy had been able to give him such an early assurance that the firm would, if necessary, be able to raise its output. For a moment he recalled the feeling of annoyance he had experienced when that girl of his, Miss Ferris, had asked if he would wish any information given to Brancaster by telephone. Could she not understand that, in a matter of no urgency, the dignity of the firm demanded the more leisurely medium of a letter? Really, Miss Ferris had been extremely absent-minded and peculiar that afternoon, and Mr. Ogilvy felt one of his periodical twinges of regret that his patience had overlooked her early shortcomings. Yes, he would write to Brancaster next morning, and he would word his letter with sufficient care to restore the prestige of the Bath & Bristol.

What had reminded him of Brancaster, he wondered? Oh yes, of course, Walter had been telling him that Brancaster had looked him up in the *Straightforward* offices that afternoon. He wondered how Brancaster would speak on a public platform, and came to the conclusion that he would probably do extremely well.

A general darkening of his immediate surroundings recalled Mr. Ogilvy's thoughts to the present, and he realized that he had left the lighted streets and entered the bombed area. Absorbed as he had been, his footsteps had unerringly followed the habitual road, crossing streets where he was wont to cross and turning where he was wont to turn. After six

years' experience in the black-out, the roads between his home and the works were so well known to him that he believed he would still be able to cover the course if total blindness afflicted him.

The fitful moonlight and the cloud shadows, mingling with the deeper shadows of gaunt and ruined walls, lent eeriness to a scene which never failed to shock Mr. Ogilvy, but from which nevertheless he was able to draw a curious and comforting moral. These ruins, which sheltered no more than acres of grass and weed and spoke of ultimate, utter disaster, now stood cheek by jowl with the unclothed skeletons of steel and concrete which were rapidly springing up in the re-birth of the city. The naked girders of the new buildings seemed to him symbolic of man's determination to triumph over all his tribulations. In his mind, he already saw new and prosperous shops where now the scaffolding and framework stood, and new homes where once again contented families could gather in the evening and talk in peace.

By day the district was filled with the clatter of builders' lorries and cement mixers, but at night it was desolate and deserted, especially at a late hour such as this when no one used the roads except as a short cut. It did not therefore surprise Mr. Ogilvy that there was no one else about, nor did his own loneliness and isolation in any way impress itself on him.

As he turned the corner from what had once been Whitemore Road into an equally unrecognizable North Street, the moon shone out clearly. He fancied he heard a movement behind him, and half turned his head. For a fraction of a second he was aware of a tiny and swift-moving glint of moonlight on something just above his head, and then he was struck down. Expert hands searched quickly through his pockets: wallet, keys, pocket knife, spectacles, loose cash, fountain pen, all in turn were dragged out and examined, and the wallet and cash were not returned. Of all this Mr. Ogilvy was at the time blissfully unaware, but he was able to piece it together when a painful consciousness returned to him, enabling him to gather up such of his belongings as had been left to him and to continue his way, shaken and dazed, to his home.

CHAPTER V

A FOOLISH TRIUMPH

Two mornings later, Margaret Ferris was sitting idly in her office waiting for the moment when the house-telephone would summon her to take the firm's correspondence to James Muir for signature. She was, it must be admitted, in a thoroughly bad humour, and the cause of it was James Muir himself. She marvelled that she could ever have cared for such a hateful man. No man who cared for a girl could possibly take so little interest in his own appearance, nor could he grudge her an evening of harmless enjoyment such as the dance to which Charles had taken her. Even worse than his absurd jealousy had been the air of ownership he adopted when first he spoke disapprovingly of the dance. To think that there had even been a time when she imagined herself to be falling in love with the man. Pah!

Her thoughts warmed towards Mr. Ogilvy, whom she had always considered rather fussy and pernickety, and she wished that he was back in his office so that she need not take the letters to Muir. Poor Mr. Ogilvy, it was such a shame that he had been hurt when he was robbed. She regretted the harsh things she had said of him when speaking to Adrian. But of course she would not have said them to anyone else, and it was different when one was talking to Adrian.

Margaret jumped, as the telephone bell at her elbow shrilled. Then she realized with relief that it was not Muir, but an outside call. It was, in fact, Mrs. Ogilvy. It seemed that her husband was much better, and desired Miss Ferris to go to his house to take down an important business letter.

Margaret sprang willingly to her feet. This, she thought, would show the intolerable Mr. Muir just where he got off. She snatched up her shorthand notebook and pencil, and slipped them in her bag. Then she took her camel-hair coat and head scarf from their hook beside the door and, with a

final and most unladylike grimace in the direction of Muir's office, she fled.

It was Janet Ogilvy herself who admitted Margaret to the house and led her upstairs. From a wealth of words Margaret disentangled the facts that, although Mr. Ogilvy had been badly bruised about the head and suffered a cut which had needed stitching, his hard felt hat had saved him from serious injury. It seemed he was even hoping to be back in his office in a day or two.

Mr. Ogilvy, fully dressed but wearing a dressing-gown instead of a jacket, was sitting in a comfortable arm-chair in his bedroom. A large white bandage covered his head, but the two blue eyes which looked up at Margaret Ferris were as bright and intelligent as ever. As was his habit, he came straight to the point.

"Good morning, Miss Ferris," he began, and added with a twinkle in his eye, "this is a nice predicament for a busy man, is it not? Now, Miss Ferris, I just want you to take down this letter to Messrs. John Ryder and Company. Head it 'Personal and Confidential'. Are you ready? Very well, then. 'Dear Mr. Brancaster, Referring to your visit to my works, and the question which you posed. . . .' "

Mr. Ogilvy swiftly warmed to his task, and whilst his voice droned steadily on, his wife took a chair by the window and watched placidly, but on guard. Janet knew it would do her husband good to keep in touch with his works like this, but she had no intention of allowing him to over-tire himself with matters which could equally well be attended to by that nice lad Jimmy. It would really be a good thing if, after this, she and her husband were to take a holiday. Jimmy could perfectly well run the works in James's absence. But she doubted all the same if James would go. She would have to have a talk with Jimmy and see if, between them, they could persuade James.

Jimmy was a good lad, she reflected, but he needed a wife or a mother to soften him and take care of him. She would have to see what she could do about finding him a wife. The girl must be worthy of him, because there was nothing flighty about Jimmy, and when he did marry he would be settled for the rest of his life. Until recently she had thought there might be something between Jimmy and this girl of James's,

Margaret Ferris, but some instinct told her that there had been trouble.

Janet Ogilvy let her eyes rest on the slim figure sitting beside her husband, head bent over her notebook so that the sunlight caught from her hair the bronze which Janet found disturbing. Margaret seemed a pleasant, quiet, steady type of girl, but Janet had not seen much of her, and you never could tell with those quiet girls, especially those with red hair; they were inclined to be uncertain and unpredictable. It had always been Janet Ogilvy's intention to look more closely into the question of Margaret Ferris before allowing Jimmy to get too firmly hooked; but if her instinct was to be believed, and she had never known it to fail in such matters, then it seemed that the investigations might be deferred.

Meanwhile Mr. Ogilvy had finished dictating his letter.

"Miss Ferris," he said, "you will have to quote the reference number of the letter which Ryder's wrote to me. You will find it in the top right-hand drawer of my desk, together with a rough note of re-tooling costs prepared for me by Mr. Muir. Janet dear, would you please hand me my key-ring?"

Mrs. Ogilvy fetched from the dressing-table the bunch of keys on the end of their heavy silver chain, and gave them to her husband.

"There, Miss Ferris," said Mr. Ogilvy, selecting a key "that is the one which opens the drawer of my desk. Bring them back to me this afternoon when you bring me the letter for signature: oh, and bring me Mr. Muir's note of costs at the same time."

Margaret Ferris returned to the Bath & Bristol in a very different mood from that in which she set out. The sun was shining, the half hour's walk was invigorating and, by the time she got back, Muir would almost certainly have gone to her office and signed the papers without her help. It was satisfactory, too, that she had been entrusted with the keys of Mr. Ogilvy's desk and safe: she felt that she was really beginning to get on. Besides all this, she felt a thrill at the thought of typing a letter to Adrian, even though it was only a business letter which had to begin- "Dear Mr. Brancaster".

When she reached the works it was one o'clock, and the fitters from the shops were streaming away to dinner.

Margaret ran lightly up the stairs to the first floor and pushed open the door of her office. She would, she reflected, leave the typing until after lunch, and this would give her longer to savour the pleasure of it. But it would be as well just to get the papers from Mr. Ogilvy's drawer and reassure herself that she knew what was required of her.

Taking the keys from her bag, she laid the bag on her desk, and noticed with satisfaction that the papers for Muir's signature had been dealt with. Then she went into Mr. Ogilvy's room, and looked uncertainly at the bunch of keys. The great big key of the safe was obvious but, as might have been expected, she had forgotten which had been pointed out as the key of the top right-hand drawer. She began to try the likely ones, whilst the ticking of the clock on the wall emphasized the silence of the works, in which only Albert Sykes, the gatekeeper, remained on duty.

At length the lock turned, and the drawer slid open. Beneath a small amount of ready cash in notes and silver lay a letter from Ryder's, and neatly pinned to it a jumble of figures which Margaret guessed must be Muir's note of costs. She took out the letter and read it to make sure it was the right one, at the same time relocking the drawer and laying the keys on Mr. Ogilvy's desk. Then the telephone bell rang in her own office.

Still holding the papers, she hurried away to answer it. She took a message for Mr. Ogilvy, and pulling the reminder pad towards her jotted it down. Then, whilst her pencil was still poised above the pad, a brilliant idea came to her, and at the foot of the dated page she made another entry in large print: 'SUPPER WITH CHARLES, EMPRESS ROOMS.'

She leaned back in her chair, and with head on one side surveyed her handiwork critically. Muir was almost certain to come into her office in the course of the afternoon and see it, and if he did not do so of his own accord she would arrange that he should.

Well content with her morning's work, Margaret Ferris then set out for lunch, giving a cheerful greeting to Albert Sykes as she stepped into the street. Lunch was generally a frugal meal, but she reflected that the events of that particular morning really justified a second ice cream.

An hour later, refreshed and carefree, she settled herself

at her desk and was taking the cover from her typewriter when Muir came into the room.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Muir," said Margaret, conjuring up a bright smile and carelessly sliding the reminder pad into a conspicuous place.

Muir said nothing. He leaned against the wall and gazed at her with cold, inscrutable eyes.

"Yes, Mr. Muir?" asked Margaret, with a slight catch in her voice. She had never seen him look quite like that, and a chill sense of foreboding seemed to take the warmth and sunlight from the afternoon.

Muir softly closed the door, and then walked over to her desk, where he stood with folded arms looking down at her. But still he said nothing, and she felt that if the silence lasted much longer she must scream.

"Mr. Muir—Jimmy," she said rather breathlessly. "What is it? Something dreadful's happened. I can see it in your face."

Muir's eyes never left hers, but his hand dropped to his pocket, and from it he drew Mr. Ogilvy's keys.

"Did he give you these?" he asked.

Margaret opened her mouth to speak, but no words would come. A dreadful sick feeling of fear assailed her, and the room seemed to grow dark. She nodded her head weakly.

"You left them on his desk." It was a statement rather than a question.

Again Margaret nodded. She was prey to an acute torture of self-pity. Had her brain not been occupied with the wicked little triumph she had written on the reminder pad for Muir's benefit, surely she would never have forgotten the keys. Now she would be dismissed from her post, discharged with a bad character and without hope of further employment. Worst of all, she would be given her dismissal by Muir.

"I think you know what this is," he said, holding up the safe key, "and its importance."

With a great effort, Margaret found her tongue. "Yes," she answered in a small voice.

Muir's eyes had never wavered. They seemed to be boring into her brain, and reading her every thought.

"Were you taking them back to him this afternoon?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

Muir handed the keys across the desk. Then he turned on his heel and went into Mr. Ogilvy's office, but before closing the door he looked back over his shoulder.

"Enjoy yourself in the Empress Rooms," he said sardonically.

For a while Margaret remained sitting limply at her desk, feeling utterly stunned. How *could* she have been so foolish? And now what did it all mean? When had Muir found the keys? Who else had access to them beforehand? Why had Muir stared at her like that? Why had she not been sacked? Perhaps her fevered imagination was magnifying the whole incident.

Quite mechanically, Margaret sought the comfort of routine. She began to type the letter for Mr. Ogilvy.

CHAPTER VI

THE DAMAGED LOCK

THE world seemed very fair to Mr. Ogilvy as he strode briskly along the road towards his works. The sun was shining and the day was warm, and the elastoplast dressing on his head was a very satisfactory substitute for the bandage he had worn. Janet had suggested he should take a few days' holiday. She really was a dear, and always so thoughtful, but it was odd that she was unable to see that he would get more pleasure from returning to his works than from anything else.

Arrived in his office, he looked around him appreciatively, scarcely able to believe it was barely a week since he had last seen those familiar surroundings. From his breast pocket he took Muir's note of costs and a personal copy of the letter he had written to Brancaster, with the intention of pinning them to John Ryder's letter in the top drawer of his desk. He inserted the key in the drawer and tried to turn the lock, but could not. He frowned, and peered closely at the lock, but could see nothing the matter with it. After another unsuccessful attempt to open it he picked up the house telephone and spoke to his secretary.

"Miss Ferris," he said, "would you please put a call through to Trimmer and Webber's, and ask them to be good enough to send out the locksmith who fitted up the 'personal' drawer in my desk? Yes, this morning if possible, please."

He replaced the telephone, and unlocking the wall safe extracted from it a specification he wished to study.

It was some two hours later that the locksmith turned to Mr. Ogilvy with a puzzled expression.

"I think, sir," he said, "that this lock has been tampered with."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Ogilvy sharply, as he rapidly

turned over in his mind the contents of the drawer. "Do you mean that it has been forced?"

The drawer had now yielded to the locksmith's persuasion, and he was looking at it curiously as he slowly turned the lock backwards and forwards.

"I'm afraid it has, sir," he said. "The surprising thing is that the man who forced it was able to lock it up again. It must have been relocked much more skilfully than it was opened."

"I'd like to see if anything is missing," said Mr. Ogilvy and the locksmith stood aside.

Mr. Ogilvy saw at once that all the ready cash had gone, but he quickly came to the conclusion that nothing else had been taken.

"Thank you," he said in a non-committal tone. "What was it you were saying?"

"I was saying, sir, that it was forced by an amateur, or else perhaps someone in a hurry; but it needed quite a clever man to relock it."

When the locksmith had gone, Mr. Ogilvy opened his safe and examined the documents in that. If his memory was to be be trusted, none of them were missing, and he therefore felt considerably relieved by the time he took up his telephone and sent for Muir.

"Jimmy," he said, when the works manager came into the room, "it appears that someone has been tampering with the lock of this drawer. In fact, it's been forced, while I've been away."

Muir cast a sour look at the offending drawer.

"Is anything missing?" he asked.

"Yes, Jimmy, a few pounds in silver and notes; not much, but all the cash there was."

"Has nothing else gone?"

"No, Jimmy. Why do you ask in that tone?"

Muir shrugged his shoulders. "It seems to be time," he said, "that I reported the fact that Ewing, the night watchman, was not in the works when the gatekeeper came on duty this morning."

Mr. Ogilvy looked startled. "Is that so?" he said. "Tell me more."

"Ewing took over from the gatekceper last night, but he

wasn't here this morning. He seems to have left the works in a hurry, for he left his cap behind."

"When did you hear about this? And have any inquiries been made about the man?"

"I heard about it an hour or so ago. The gatekeeper didn't report it until he found Ewing's cap. He should have reported at once, of course, but then in practice one doesn't. It was only when he found the cap had been left behind that he thought there might be something wrong. I've sent round to Ewing's lodgings, but he hasn't gone home. He's a widower," concluded Muir briefly.

Mr. Ogilvy wrinkled his brows in thought and gazed at the works manager, whose expression told him nothing.

"The obvious inference," said Mr. Ogilvy, "is that Ewing rifled the drawer and then bolted."

Muir shrugged his shoulders again.

"Ewing's been in our employ for quite a long time, hasn't he?" asked Mr. Ogilvy.

"He's been with us for six years, and always been trustworthy."

"Do we know anything about his private affairs, Jimmy? Was he in debt, or anything of that sort?"

"I believe he paid the rent to his landlady regularly every week. Beyond that I cannot tell you anything, sir."

"He wouldn't live long on the cash in this drawer, anyway," said Mr. Ogilvy reflectively. "But of course he wouldn't know that until he'd broken it open."

Muir said nothing. His gaze had left the drawer, and swung round the room until it rested on the safe. His eyes only paused momentarily before travelling onwards, but Mr. Ogilvy had noticed the pause.

"Are you thinking of the safe, Jimmy?" he asked.

"I was wondering if you'd opened it today," said Muir briefly.

"Yes I have, Jimmy. There's nothing wrong with the safe, and there's nothing missing from it." He glanced uneasily back at his desk. "But of course there might have been," he added.

"Yes, there might," said Muir.

Mr. Ogilvy looked up quickly. There was something vaguely menacing in Muir's tone.

"What exactly do you mean, Jimmy?" he asked.

"Much the same as you, I expect," answered Muir laconically.

Mr. Ogilvy gazed at him searchingly. "Jimmy," he said at length, "I keep the duplicate key of the safe in that drawer."

Muir remained silent, gazing bleakly out of the window.

"Jimmy," demanded Mr. Ogilvy firmly, "did you know that? Did anyone else know?"

"I expect lots of people knew, sir," said Muir slowly. "People know much more than Managing Directors imagine."

Mr. Ogilvy drummed irritably with his fingers on the top of his desk. The comfortable security in which he had lived for many years was being rudely shattered.

"What do you think about it yourself, Jimmy?" he asked.

"I think that if Ewing broke open that lock, then my judgment of men is at fault," said Muir tersely. "But the two things do seem to connect. Have you told the police about the drawer?"

"Not yet," said Mr. Ogilvy. "But I think I had better now tell them about the drawer and about Ewing too."

He did not pick up the telephone, however. He was still looking quizzically at the younger man, with whom he felt distinctly annoyed. Muir had done everything possible since he learned of the night watchman's disappearance, but for once in a way his taciturn manner was very irritating. Such a thing had never happened before in all of Mr. Ogilvy's long association with the firm. He had given his trust to the staff, from works manager down to the youngest apprentice, and it had never been seriously misplaced. Now he sought to exonerate one of his employees.

"Perhaps, Jimmy, we are jumping to conclusions too hastily," he amended.

He pressed a bell on the desk, and his secretary answered it.

"Miss Ferris," said Mr. Ogilvy, "do you recall the occasion, three or four days ago, when I gave you my keys? Why, good gracious, girl, whatever is the matter?"

Margaret Ferris was looking deathly pale, and she clutched at a chair. Muir sprang forward and put an arm about her shoulders, but she pulled herself together, and shook him off.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said to Mr. Ogilvy in a low voice. "I've found this prolonged hot weather very trying. You want to know something about your keys, sir?"

"Yes, Miss Ferris," said Mr. Ogilvy doubtfully, "if you feel up to answering my questions. You got Ryder's letter from this drawer, did you not? Well now, can you recall whether or not there was any money in the drawer?"

This was not the questioning Margaret had dreaded. Her colour began to return, and her voice sounded stronger.

"Why, yes sir," she said. "There were several notes and quite a lot of loose change on top of the letters."

"I see." Mr. Ogilvy paused, apparently deep in thought. "I suppose no one has been in this office in my absence other than, say, yourself or Mr. Muir?"

"Not so far as I know, sir," answered Margaret uneasily, as vague fears of the unknown began to gather round her again.

"I think it all comes back to Ewing," said Muir bluntly.

"Perhaps it does," acknowledged Mr. Ogilvy.

There was a prolonged silence which Margaret found so unbearable that, against her better judgment, she broke it.

"Excuse me, sir," she asked rather shakily, "but has something gone wrong?"

"Yes," said Mr. Ogilvy, "the money has been stolen."

Margaret Ferris clutched at the chair again for support as the room began to spin. Her mind went back to that fatal lunch hour, and she fancied she could see a masked figure who took the keys from the desk where she had so carelessly left them, and who deftly opened the top right-hand drawer and took what he wanted. Then she realized that Mr. Ogilvy was still speaking.

"The drawer," he was saying, "has been broken open."

From black despair, Margaret was swept back to a carefree world on a wave of hysterical relief. No masked man would break open the drawer when the keys lay at his hand.

Mr. Ogilvy dismissed his secretary, and turned to Muir with a puzzled frown.

"I cannot make out what is the matter with that girl," he said. "She's been most peculiar lately, and now she looks downright ill."

"I expect it's the hot weather," said Muir drily. "She said so herself."

"Then let's hope for a cool spell," said Mr. Ogilvy, "otherwise I shall be looking for a new secretary. Now Jimmy, there's one more thing I want to know. Did you have anyone back at the works after closing hour last night? There were no night shifts or overtime were there?"

Muir shook his head.

"Well then," said Mr. Ogilvy, taking up the telephone, "it is time we sent for the police."

CHAPTER VII

INSPECTOR GREGORY INTERVENES

In the days which followed, Mr. Ogilvy dismissed the robbery from his mind; but he was confident that in due course the police would catch Ewing, and therefore it was no surprise to him when he learned that Superintendent Wildish had called to see him again.

"It's the Superintendent," he said, laying down the house telephone and turning to Margaret Ferris who stood at his elbow, "with an inspector whose name I did not catch. Will you show them in, please? I'll sign the rest of these papers tomorrow."

Superintendent Wildish was followed into the room by a smaller, stockily-built man whose dark hair was turning to iron grey.

"Good evening, sir," said Wildish. "May I introduce Inspector Gregory of Scotland Yard? There's been a development in the matter of your night watchman, and we thought it advisable to ask for Yard assistance at once."

"I'm glad to meet you, Inspector," said Mr. Ogilvy, "and I hope you can help us. In the circumstances I feel keenly on the subject of this man's disappearance. May I know what the new development is? I feel it must be serious if Scotland Yard has been called in."

It was Superintendent Wildish who spoke again.

"I'm afraid it is serious, sir, and I'm afraid it will be a shock to you. We've found Ewing's body. He has been murdered."

Mr. Ogilvy's eyes opened wide with mingled astonishment and horror.

"Good God," he said, and then added "poor devil. How did it happen?"

"I'm afraid he'd been hit on the head by something hard and heavy," answered Wildish tersely, "and one can only hope that he died at the first blow. The body has been found some

miles out in the country, but it appears probable that he was taken there after death. The features are so mutilated as to be unrecognizable, and all markings have been removed from the clothing, but the body has been identified by Ewing's dentist."

"Good God," said Mr. Ogilvy again. "When was he killed, Superintendent? Can you say?"

"Some days ago, sir. One cannot tell with any certainty after such a long time, but our surgeon thinks that death may well have occurred on the night he vanished from your works. You realize, sir, that this supposition, which is the only reasonable one, raises the breaking open of your desk to a much higher level than petty theft?"

"Yes, I see that, of course," said Mr. Ogilvy quietly. His brain leaped backwards, and he recalled the man from Trimmer & Webber's who had slowly turned the damaged lock to and fro.

"Now I understand what puzzled the locksmith," continued Mr. Ogilvy. "He said, if you remember, that the drawer had been opened in a clumsy manner but relocked more skilfully. I suppose Ewing heard the thief working in here and disturbed him while he was opening the drawer."

"Exactly, sir; and having disposed of Ewing, the man was able to re-lock the drawer at leisure. I must say that we've considered the possibility of murder ever since we heard the locksmith's opinion. Now, sir, remembering the important and confidential contracts which your firm executes, and the fact that you kept the duplicate key of the safe in the drawer that was forced, you will appreciate the gravity of the case."

"But the key was still at the bottom of the drawer, and nothing was stolen from the safe," objected Mr. Ogilvy. "I checked its contents on the day that Ewing was reported missing."

"Maybe nothing was taken, sir," said Wildish, "but something may have been copied, or photographed. If you think it out, you will see this is no case of simple theft, or simple murder either. Just consider the theft. I think it is pretty clear that Ewing himself didn't steal the cash, and it's hardly likely that he would trouble to admit an accomplice to the works for such a small robbery. Still less is it likely that anyone from outside would take the risk of breaking into

the building for the sake of the few pounds to be stolen from that drawer. Yet nothing else appears to have been taken, either from your office, or from the cashier's safe, or anywhere else. It's a robbery that only makes sense if the missing night-watchman can be identified as the thief, which I'm now sure he was not."

"Yes, I agree," said Mr. Ogilvy cautiously. "But the murder seems a great complication."

"The murder, sir, was never meant to be discovered. An ordinary thief disturbed at work on your desk might possibly have killed Ewing in a struggle, but he would have killed on the spur of the moment and then bolted. In this case the man killed, but did not bolt. He took immense trouble to conceal Ewing's body many miles away, and even greater trouble to cover up the identity of the body in case it should be found. The murderer must have had a more compelling motive than the theft of a few treasury notes and pieces of silver."

"That is logical," agreed Mr. Ogilvy. "But surely it is only guesswork to suppose that somebody actually opened my safe?"

"Yes, it is guesswork, sir. But I think it's an intelligent guess that someone who knew where you kept the duplicate key wished to do so, and that having killed Ewing he had opportunity. It's the only theory that supplies an adequate motive for what happened. You tell me that some of the papers in your safe are of national importance. Very well, sir, there'd be no need for the thief to steal them. He would do better to copy them and replace them. The theft would remain unknown, and the country would live in a fool's paradise instead of being awake to its danger. But discovery by the night-watchman would remain a possibility, and a man who wanted to examine the papers in your safe would have thought of that beforehand, and would have made a suitable plan. It would mean murder, and mutilation and concealment of the body, so that your firm should be aware of nothing more alarming than a missing night-watchman. The notes and silver in the drawer would be a godsend to the murderer, because he only had to take them himself to provide a motive for Ewing's disappearance. It may even be that the lock of the drawer was damaged on purpose, so as to throw suspicion on Ewing. But the murderer made one mistake, sir, and he

may make another. He should either have left the drawer open, or else he should have made a thorough job of wrecking the lock. Instead of that he used a high degree of skill to relock it, and it was that fact which first aroused our suspicions. I don't mind admitting that we've used greater resources in our search for a dead body than we'd have used had we believed Ewing to be alive."

Wildish accepted a cigarette from the box on Mr. Ogilvy's desk, whilst Gregory slowly and methodically thumbed tobacco into the bowl of his pipe.

"Now, sir," Wildish went on, "Inspector Gregory is attached to the Home Office for internal security work, and if your safe has been tampered with, the matter is very much his concern. Officially I am still in charge of the case, because we want to keep the inspector's name out of it as far as possible, but in fact we are now handling it together. The inspector has many sources of information which are not normally available to me. I should add," he concluded, "that we have not yet released the news of the finding of the body, but I doubt if we shall be able to suppress it much longer."

"I think, sir," said Gregory, speaking for the first time, "that I know all the facts concerning Ewing's disappearance and the damage to the lock, but I'd very much like to ask some questions about the firm's business, if I may."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Ogilvy.

"Then sir, I'd like your opinion on this point. Do you in fact consider that the documents in your safe are such as might tempt a man to contemplate murder?"

"During the war, of course, I should have answered 'yes' to that question," said Mr. Ogilvy, "but today I would think it very doubtful. Much of our business is still of a confidential nature, both commercially and nationally, but I would imagine that nowadays both the scientific developments and the time factor are of less importance than during the war, at all events from the national point of view. In peace-time, scientists and technicians in other countries, who are probably working on similar lines to our own, have time to solve their own problems. However, I suppose the inducement to indulge in violence must remain in some degree."

"And are you at present working on any particularly confidential apparatus?" asked Gregory.

"Yes, I should say that we have at least two contracts which come under that heading, though they differ widely in character.

"Firstly there is some apparatus for Messrs. Wilberforce and Marling, which they intend to use in a new steel process. The significance of this is both commercial and national, for their process will have a big influence on production of the finest quality armour plate. You will understand that armour plate must not only be hard, but tough as opposed to brittle. Our instruments will measure temper and toughness, and will provide what one might call a 'coefficient of toughness'. I should add that I'd be very surprised to learn that a British firm big enough to compete with Wilberforce and Marling would stoop to any form of shady practice, let alone crime, in order to steal their secret.

"Then, secondly, we have an Admiralty contract for a certain modulator panel. This, however, is only a subsidiary part of a larger contract awarded to John Ryder and Company, in Mantringham; and our own part of the apparatus, though highly secret, would be obscure in its functions without comparison with the main body of the gear, of which I myself have no knowledge."

"And which of these contracts would you consider to be of the greatest national importance?" asked Gregory.

"That is not easy to answer," said Mr. Ogilvy, "as I lack full knowledge of the Admiralty apparatus." He paused, and Gregory became aware of a pair of exceedingly alert and intelligent blue eyes fixed firmly on him. "But from your point of view, Inspector," he went on, "I would say there was this difference between them. If the details of our Wilberforce and Marling contract have been stolen, then the damage is already done, and all you can do is to find the thief and murderer. But if it is the Admiralty contract, then the damage is not yet done, and will not be until the details of John Ryder's contract are also stolen and compared with ours."

"Thank you, sir," said Gregory, "I'm grateful for that opinion and will act on it. Now would you tell me this, sir? I don't want to cast doubt on any of your staff, but how do you ensure the security of such apparatus in your own works? Your employees must acquire full knowledge of it in the course of its making, and the instruments themselves must actually be on view in your workshops."

"Yes, naturally; and there is of course an element of risk, but not very much. A firm like this is well acquainted with its skilled employees, and I would put their loyalty as high as my own. Moreover, although an examination of the instruments would be very revealing to an intelligent man, he still would not know their full functions, capabilities and purpose. Even the blue prints in the hands of my designers, or in the drawing office or workshops, do not tell the whole story. The really confidential things are the written requirements and specifications; that is to say written instructions that machines must have certain capabilities and be able to carry out certain specific tasks. Those papers, in the case of very confidential apparatus, are kept in my safe."

"So that from the security point of view, your safe is quite the most important thing in the works?"

"Yes, it undoubtedly is; and in the case of the Admiralty contract that is especially true at the present time, because the Admiralty took delivery some weeks ago of the four panels that were ordered, and only the blue prints and specifications remain."

"I see," said Gregory reflectively. "That is rather odd. At least it's odd if the panels are the cause of all this trouble. I would have thought that if anyone was interested in them, they would have tried to steal the specifications long ago, while the work was going on. Now that the job is finished, what is there to draw attention to the fact that you ever made them?"

"The job isn't finished," said Mr. Ogilvy. "The four panels were experimental. We anticipate a big order once they have successfully passed their trials."

"I see," said Gregory again; "and when would you expect such an order?"

"Possibly next month, but probably not so soon."

"Has anything in the meantime happened in your works which might have brought the apparatus into the limelight again?"

"Nothing that I know of," said Mr. Ogilvy decidedly.

Gregory turned and spoke to Wildish.

"I think you said, didn't you, that you reached no conclusion as to whether or not the murderer forced an entry through one of the doors or windows?"

"That is so," said Wildish. "Mind you, the works had been

in full use for the best part of a day before we were called in. Doors and windows had been opened and shut, and things of all sorts had been moved here and there since the previous night. I can only tell you there were no signs of an entry having been forced. It's quite possible that the murderer was actually admitted by Ewing, in which case he must have been either a presumed friend of Ewing's or else a member of the firm with a right to come back after the works were closed. But this last supposition doesn't fit in with our theory that the lock was damaged when Ewing disturbed the fellow at work in here."

"No," agreed Gregory, "it doesn't look like the work of anyone connected with the firm, at least not unless the lock was damaged on purpose to implicate Ewing. But it's hard to see how anyone outside the firm could know where the spare safe key was kept." He spoke again to Mr. Ogilvy. "I'm sorry," he continued, "that I keep harping back to the key of your safe, but quite frankly the drawer doesn't seem to have contained anything else worthy of such a crime. Can you tell me who knew that the spare key was kept there?"

"Well," began Mr. Ogilvy hesitantly, "I thought that nobody knew, but apparently I was wrong. Mr. Muir, my works manager, tells me that he knew, and that others may have done. Then my secretary, Miss Ferris, had access to the drawer a few days ago. I gave her my keys whilst I was ill at home, so that she could get some papers from the top of the drawer. The safe key was right underneath a lot of other papers, but it's possible that Miss Ferris saw it."

"That would have been after you were attacked and injured in Whitemore Road, sir? I was sorry to hear of that."

"I was lucky," said Mr. Ogilvy. "I lost very little, only the few pounds that were in my wallet and a little loose change. I thought it surprising that my watch wasn't taken."

"Perhaps the thieves thought it too risky," said Gregory. "A watch can be identified, but notes and silver are safe. What else were you carrying?"

"The usual things, fountain-pen, spectacles, keys and so on; nothing of any consequence."

"And none of those things were taken?"

"No; they were all dragged out of my pockets, but I was able to gather them up again when I came to my senses."

"May I see the drawer that was forced?" asked Gregory, returning to the point.

Mr. Ogilvy took out his keys and opened it, and Gregory saw that it was steel-lined and strong.

"The money was on top of these papers; but the safe key was underneath and out of sight, at least it ought to have been," said Mr. Ogilvy. "I need hardly say that I no longer keep it there."

"Yes, I see," said Gregory thoughtfully, as he lifted a letter from the drawer and returned it to the same place. 'But you say that the whereabouts of the key may have been common knowledge. I think you said that was your works manager's opinion?"

"That was what he seemed to think," answered Mr. Ogilvy.

"Might I speak to him for a moment, sir?"

"Certainly. Would you like to see him here? I've finished my work for the day, and you can have this office to yourself if you'd rather I wasn't present."

"It's kind of you, sir, but I'd be glad if you'd wait and introduce me to him. It's a very simple question that I want to ask."

Mr. Ogilvy spoke briefly into the house telephone.

"Jimmy," he said when Muir came into the room, "I want you to meet Inspector Gregory, who has come to help us in the matter of Ewing's disappearance. Inspector, this is my works manager, Mr. Muir. If there's one thing better than a Scot running a business like this, Inspector, it's two Scots."

"I've been wondering, Mr. Muir," began Gregory, "whether the director's safe may have been tampered with on the night that your watchman disappeared. Can you tell me if it was common knowledge that the duplicate key was kept in the drawer that was broken open?"

Muir shrugged his shoulders. "How should I know?" he asked. "I haven't told anyone."

"Naturally. But you might have been aware that it was widely known."

Muir said nothing.

"It's a simple question, sir," said Gregory quietly, "and quite harmless. I'm not in the least interested in the names of the people who knew about it. If one person knew, then a

hundred others might have done. I'm simply trying to establish whether or not the whereabouts of the key was known at all. Do you know if it was?"

"No," answered Muir slowly, "I do not." A bleak and wintry expression settled on his face. "If the drawer was broken open in order to steal the safe key, then I can only suggest myself as the culprit."

"Nonsense, Jimmy," interrupted Mr. Ogilvy. "You told me yourself that lots of people might have known about it."

"Oh, and so they might. But the inspector asked me to tell him what I know, not what I think."

"Mr. Muir," said Wildish, "I think you ought to know that this affair has taken a much more serious turn. I'm telling you in confidence, because the news has not yet been released. Ewing has been murdered, probably on the night he vanished from your works."

A hard glint came into Muir's eyes.

"I'm not surprised," he said grimly.

"Why do you say that?" asked Gregory.

"Simply my judgment of men. I never believed that Ewing touched the desk," answered Muir coldly. He had recovered his self-composure. "I'm afraid, Inspector," he went on, "that this dramatic news hasn't stirred my memories of the duplicate key."

Gregory nodded, but said nothing; and when Mr. Ogilvy spoke it was more with the intention of ending an awkward silence than for any other reason.

"I don't know if my secretary would be able to help you, Inspector," he said. "It's just possible she might be able to tell us whether or not the duplicate key was in its usual place on the day she opened the drawer."

"Yes, it might be worth asking her," said Gregory, rather absent-mindedly. "Perhaps you would ask her about it yourself, sir?"

Gregory's thoughts had been far away, but he quickly recalled them to his immediate surroundings and looked at Margaret Ferris with renewed interest when she came into the room. He found his first impressions fully confirmed. She was, he decided, a very attractive girl who was looking distinctly ill.

"Miss Ferris," said Mr. Ogilvy, "you remember the day you took Messrs. Ryder's letter from this drawer?"

"Yes, I remember, sir," she answered in a small voice.

"Did you notice the spare key of my safe in the drawer?" asked Mr. Ogilvy.

Margaret Ferris cast a hunted look around the room. "I never touched it, sir," she cried wildly. "I never touched the key."

"No, my dear, I'm sure you wouldn't do such a thing," said Mr. Ogilvy in a kindly tone. "I only wanted to know whether you saw it, or whether it was out of sight beneath all the papers. Do you remember?"

With a great effort Margaret fought down the feeling of panic that threatened to engulf her, but her voice was husky when she answered.

"I didn't see it, sir. I simply took Ryder's letter from the top."

Gregory was leaning back in his chair studying the very different expressions of these people with profound interest. Mr. Ogilvy looked puzzled, and slightly incredulous; Muir, tight-lipped, was gazing stonily out of the window with inscrutable eyes; whilst the girl with the hunted expression was evidently near the limits of her self-control. There was clearly much more to be learned from Mr. Ogilvy and his associates.

For the moment, however, Gregory had decided on two courses of action which would admit of no delay, and further inquiries at the Bath & Bristol could very well wait till the following morning. He caught the eye of Superintendent Wildish and got up from his chair.

"Well, sir," he said to Mr. Ogilvy, "it's been very good of you to spare me so much of your time. I don't think I need worry you any more this afternoon, but I suppose I could find you here tomorrow? Some other point might occur to me on which I might be glad of your help."

He shook hands with Mr. Ogilvy and Muir, whilst Margaret Ferris moved mechanically over to the door and opened it. Then he followed the superintendent out of the works into the the hot and dusty street.

CHAPTER VIII

INSPECTOR GREGORY DETECTS A LIE

In the dining-room of The Feathers next morning, Gregory toyed idly with an egg and bacon whilst his brain was busy with the curious happenings at the Bath & Bristol. He felt satisfied that for the moment he had taken the right course of action. The attack on Mr. Ogilvy and the robbery at his works had already been for some while in the able hands of the superintendent; and Wildish, he knew, was now devoting all his resources to the tracking of Ewing's murderer. It was Gregory's job to consider the wider implications of the affair. If national security was threatened, then it was his first and immediate duty to assume that the worst had occurred at the Bath & Bristol, and take steps to block any further leakage of information. Supposing that the Wilberforce and Marling contract had been compromised, then he was already too late, and consequently he ignored it. If, on the other hand, the Admiralty apparatus was in danger he might yet be in time; but not if he patiently followed up the case from its beginnings, leaving his quarry ahead of him; he must cast his net so widely as to be sure the man he wanted was still within its meshes.

He had therefore deliberately cut short his inquiries at the Bath & Bristol the previous afternoon, and as soon as he had left the works he made two long telephone calls. The first of these had been to the City police in Mantringham, whose superintendent had undertaken to set an immediate guard on the works of John Ryder & Company. As a result of the second he had arranged a meeting in the Admiralty with the Director of Naval Intelligence at nine o'clock in the evening of the day which was just beginning.

Having done all he could to prevent the trouble spreading, Gregory now felt free to consider the things which had already happened. There was a very odd similarity between the attack on Mr. Ogilvy and the raid on his works, and Gregory won-

dered if there could be any connection between the two. In each case petty theft was accompanied by violence, and each attack was directed against Mr. Ogilvy's personal possessions. In the case of the raid on the Bath & Bristol, however, Gregory was perfectly satisfied that petty theft was not the object; the duplicate key of the safe was the only thing in the drawer which justified the circumstances of the murder. Therefore, if the two crimes were connected there must have been some deeper motive than theft to account for the attack on Mr. Ogilvy. Of course they might have been two quite separate occurrences: perhaps the attack in the street had been no more than a chance encounter with a foot-pad. Yet Gregory felt that it would be stretching the bounds of coincidence to believe that two such similar but disconnected misfortunes should befall one man and his possessions in so short a time. The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that somewhere there must be a link between the two, and that Mr. Ogilvy must have been attacked because he was Mr. Ogilvy rather than because of the money which might be found in a man's wallet.

That reflection started a new train of thought, and Gregory began to wonder if Mr. Ogilvy's wallet had contained anything besides the treasury notes. Nothing else had been mentioned, but a man generally carried letters or papers of one kind or another, and in this case there might have been something important, the significance of which had not been apparent to Mr. Ogilvy. It was a matter which must be investigated without delay.

Then there was something unsatisfactory about the works manager and the secretary, and that also must be cleared up. There had been nothing co-operative about Muir, and although that might simply have been due to an abrupt and surly disposition, Gregory was of the opinion that the man knew more than he chose to say; whilst Miss Ferris was obviously suffering from a bad attack of nerves. Two very good reasons, in addition to his wish to take immediate action in Mantringham and the Admiralty, had helped Gregory to resist the temptation of questioning the girl more closely on the preceding afternoon. Experience had taught him that anyone in such a state would give wild and irrelevant answers which could be utterly misleading: given time to calm down, the

girl also had time to compose a plausible story if she feared the truth, but Gregory felt confident of his ability to differentiate between fact and fiction. Moreover, he had no wish to press his questioning until he was sure of his best line of approach.

On this last point, his line of approach, his mind was now made up. Wildish was well able to handle the normal police inquiries without his assistance. For himself, he would seek for a link between the attack on Mr. Ogilvy and the tragedy at his works, and to do that he must assume that the attack in the streets was no chance encounter, but something which was planned in advance.

Who would have known that Mr. Ogilvy was walking home from St. Cedric's Hall instead of travelling by car as might have been expected? Quite a number of people at the political meeting would have been aware of this, and it should be possible to check their movements. On the other hand, those who saw him set out on foot would have had surprisingly little time to organize and carry out the attack, and Gregory decided that his immediate investigations must go back further than that. Who then would have known that Mr. Ogilvy would attend the meeting? Doubtless many people would have known this for a long while, and the prospect of a laborious and intolerably slow inquiry opened up before Gregory's eyes: for the moment, time just would not permit of it. Where then was he to start? As a first move, he decided to trace Mr. Ogilvy's movements and associations from the morning of the day on which he was attacked.

Gregory finished his toast and marmalade, and glanced at his watch. He had much to do before catching the two-thirty train for London, and reflected that if he went straight round to the Bath & Bristol Works he would probably find Mr. Ogilvy in his office by the time he arrived.

At the works, however, he was disappointed. Mrs. Ogilvy had telephoned to say that her husband was indisposed, and that she had prevailed on him not to go into his office that morning. Gregory preferred to make his inquiries methodically, beginning at the top and working downwards: but time was short, so he decided to question Muir and Miss Ferris first, and to visit Mr. Ogilvy in his home later in the forenoon. He realized that Muir would be difficult to deal with, and that

unless he could find some chink in the man's armour he was unlikely to learn much except in answer to direct questions, which seldom gave the kind of information he liked.

Muir's welcome, as he grudgingly got up from his chair, was acid.

"I'm afraid my memory hasn't stirred, Inspector," he said coldly. "I cannot tell you anything more about the duplicate key."

"As a matter of fact, it wasn't the key that I wanted to talk about," said Gregory. "I want some information about Mr. Ogilvy's movements on the day he was robbed in the streets."

"Then why don't you ask Mr. Ogilvy?"

"Because he isn't here, sir," answered Gregory evenly, "and I've little time to spare."

"I thought you were inquiring into Ewing's murder," said Muir.

"So I am, sir, but when two crimes have been committed it's quite normal for a policeman to inquire into both."

Muir gave a mirthless laugh. "I was sorry for Mr. Ogilvy," he said, "but I cannot see how you compare his personal misfortune with the things that happened here."

Gregory found his temper rising, but his voice remained calm and level when he spoke.

"Nevertheless, I must ask you to give me a little of your time, sir," he said.

With an air of resignation, Muir waved him to a chair, and resumed his own seat behind the desk. "Go on," he said.

With patient questions, Gregory extracted from Muir the story of Mr. Ogilvy's morning at the works on 11 June. He learned of Brancaster's visit and its purpose, of the long discussion with Evan Davies in Mr. Ogilvy's office, and of the untimely arrival of Mr. van Arlberg.

"Tell me, sir," Gregory asked at length, "was Mr. Brancaster's visit by appointment?"

"Yes."

"I suppose that would have been arranged some time beforehand? I imagine Mr. Ogilvy is a busy man, and wouldn't have such a conference at short notice, would he?"

"He did in this case. Brancaster's firm only wrote three days previously asking for the appointment."

"I see. Well, I suppose Mr. Brancaster is a busy man too, and I expect it's difficult for him to leave his own works."

"It wasn't difficult for him to have lunch here before going back," said Muir shortly.

Gregory smiled. "Man must eat," he said. "Even policemen have to do that, and I'm hoping for lunch myself before I leave."

Muir looked at him curiously. "You're going away already?" he asked.

"Yes. But I dare say I'll be back again. Now, sir, this may seem to you unimportant, but I think I ought to know rather more about your firm's business and its contracts."

"Do you mean in the general or the technical sense?" asked Muir.

"A little of both, I think," said Gregory, "but I'm afraid I've not a very technical brain, so I hope you'll spare me from too much detail."

Muir spoke briefly in general terms, of contract procedure, of orders placed with his firm, and of other firms with whom he dealt. Then he became technical, and at once his terse manner dropped from him. Gregory realized that he was listening to a genuine enthusiast, and one who might well be a very brilliant electrical engineer. Muir spoke of frequencies and capacities, of induced currents and impedence, and of the possibility of harnessing the anomalous propagation of certain rays to man's bidding. Gregory's head began to spin, and he would have cried out to Muir to stop had he not recognized the impossibility of such a thing: it would be as well to try to check a newly launched ship from sliding down the ways. By the time Muir finished speaking, Gregory had a feeling of acute mental indigestion.

"I see," said Gregory gravely. "Now about the question of mass-producing this apparatus for the Admiralty. I imagine your firm had been considering it for some while before Mr. Brancaster called?"

"No," said Muir, and Gregory became aware of a pair of cold grey eyes fixed upon him intently.

"Perhaps that was a silly question," said Gregory. "I suppose a busy firm like yours has to devote all its energies to work in hand, and leave future commitments to be dealt with as they arise."

Muir bridled. "No," he said again. "We'd soon be out of business if we did that. But we'd also be out of business if we left our shops idle while waiting for the Admiralty to carry out trials and possibly place an order, or possibly not."

"Of course. So really your firm has had no reason to consider the Admiralty apparatus since the panels left your works some weeks ago? I mean, there's been nothing to bring it back under discussion?"

For a while Muir stared fixedly at Gregory, without speaking.

"Inspector," he said at length, "I think you came here to discuss Mr. Ogilvy's accident, and you've done nothing but talk about the Admiralty apparatus. What are you really interested in?"

"Everything," said Gregory blandly, "but perhaps I've been straying from the point. Now tell me, who is Mr. van Arlberg?"

"A mining engineer," answered Muir. "If you want his address I expect Miss Ferris can give it to you."

"Thank you, sir, I'll ask her. You must cater for a very wide range of interests. I hadn't realized that a mining engineer would require your instruments."

"He wouldn't," said Muir shortly.

Gregory ignored the rebuff, and asked Muir if he knew what Mr. Ogilvy's movements had been during that afternoon and evening. It seemed that Muir had not seen him again that day from the time Brancaster left the office, and had no idea how he had spent the afternoon.

"But I can tell you what he did in the evening," concluded Muir venomously. "He had supper with Walter Danbury and that son of his, and went on with them to the meeting in St. Cedric's Hall."

"Do you know if they walked to the meeting?"

"They didn't if I know anything of Danbury."

"Were you at the meeting yourself, sir?"

"No, I wasn't," snapped Muir.

"Then I don't suppose you can help me much further, sir. I was wondering who else would have known Mr. Ogilvy was walking home instead of going by car, but I dare say he could tell me that himself, or perhaps Mr. Danbury would know. Who is Mr. Danbury, sir?"

In a few brief and biting sentences, Muir explained.

"I see," said Gregory, noting the address of the *Straightforward* offices. "Is he a close friend of Mr. Ogilvy?"

"Much too close," said Muir violently.

"Why do you say that, sir?" Gregory asked.

"Because he's always coming to the works and asking questions that are nothing to do with him," snapped Muir.

Gregory turned the subject. "As I told you," he said, "I don't want to worry you any more about the duplicate key of the safe, but naturally I'd still like to find out if its whereabouts were generally known. Do you suppose Mr. Ogilvy's secretary could help me there?"

Muir shot a vitriolic look at him.

"If you want to know that," he said, "you can ask her yourself. I'm a busy man, Inspector."

Muir got up from his desk, and with scant ceremony showed Gregory out of his office.

The clatter of a typewriter told Gregory that Margaret Ferris also was busy, but she welcomed him with a bright smile. Her eyes showed lack of sleep, but her manner was cool and calm.

"Good morning, Inspector," she said. "I'm afraid Mr. Ogilvy won't be in today. Can I help you in any way?"

"Yes please, if you can spare the time," said Gregory in a friendly tone. "I wanted to ask Mr. Ogilvy about the business calls he had on the day of the meeting in St. Cedric's Hall, but I don't suppose he'd mind you telling me, would he? You see, I have to catch an early train for London."

Margaret spoke of the visits of Brancaster and van Arlberg, and her story, as far as her personal knowledge enabled her, confirmed all that Muir had said about the morning of 11 June. In the afternoon, it seemed, Mr. Ogilvy had had no visitors, and had gone home early for tea.

Gregory was impressed by the remarkable change in the nervous girl of the previous day. She had clearly taken a firm grip on herself, and she now spoke frankly and briefly, with no unnecessary detail.

"I understand," said Gregory when she had finished speaking, "that in the evening he went to St. Cedric's Hall with Mr. Walter Danbury. I suppose you weren't at the meeting yourself?"

"I'm afraid not, Inspector," she smiled. "I'm afraid I don't take politics very seriously."

"I suppose Mr. Danbury would have taken him to the hall in his car, wouldn't he?"

"Oh yes, I imagine so. At all events, that was the arrangement. Mr. Ogilvy was having supper with him first. They are very close friends."

"I was just wondering," said Gregory, "what induced Mr. Ogilvy to walk home that night instead of going by car, but perhaps he and Mr. Danbury live on opposite sides of the city."

Margaret's face clouded.

"No indeed," she said, "they live in the same district, and I'm sure Mr. Danbury would have taken him home had he wanted a lift. Poor Mr. Ogilvy," she went on, "I've often wished he wouldn't walk through those dark and desolate streets at night. I wouldn't go near them myself. May I know why you are asking this, Inspector?"

"Certainly," answered Gregory, "I'll be quite frank with you. I'm wondering if there can be any connection between the attack on Mr. Ogilvy and the robbery at the works."

A troubled frown settled on Margaret's brow.

"Oh!" she breathed, "but surely not: how could there be?"

"There probably couldn't," said Gregory lightly. "I don't see how the attack on Mr. Ogilvy can have been planned in advance, because nobody would know he was walking home until he actually left the meeting. But it's possible, so we have to consider it."

"You are wrong about one thing," said Margaret in a quiet voice. "Anyone who knows Mr. Ogilvy would have felt quite sure he would walk home."

"Why is that?" asked Gregory.

"Because he never uses a car if he can possibly help it. He likes walking, and says it keeps him fit."

"What, even at that time of night?" said Gregory, surprised.

"Oh yes, he'd think nothing of it, and he'd do it in the depths of winter just the same."

For a moment Gregory pondered this unpromising news. Given a knowledge of Mr. Ogilvy, it seemed that anyone who

knew he was attending the meeting, and anyone who saw him on the platform, might confidently have planned the attack. He switched his questioning to the subject of the duplicate key.

"I wonder, Miss Ferris," he said, "if you can help me with this. Was it generally known that Mr. Ogilvy kept the duplicate key of his safe in the drawer that was broken open?"

"Oh, I expect lots of people knew that," she answered airily, and he noticed that mention of the key no longer seemed to cause her any distress.

"Very likely," he agreed, "but I was just wondering how that sort of news gets around. How, for instance, did you come to know yourself?"

"My dear Inspector," she said, "a busy man doesn't notice his secretary any more than his furniture—at least some men don't. I was constantly going into Mr. Ogilvy's office, and I expect I know all sorts of things that I'm not supposed to know."

"Quite so, but I was hoping you could tell me how you learned about the key in particular. However, I don't suppose it matters."

"I don't suppose it does," she said in a pitying tone, "but how do you think I knew? Because I've seen him take it out of the drawer to open the safe, of course."

"Yes, of course," said Gregory rather absently, and fell silent, considering his next move.

"I'm telling you this in confidence," he said at length. "We have not yet released the news. I'm afraid it will be rather a shock to you. The night watchman, Ewing, has been murdered."

Margaret's grey eyes opened wide with horror.

"Oh," she murmured, "but it can't be true."

She had been standing by her desk, and now she clutched at it for support, and sat down abruptly on its corner.

"Tell me it isn't really true, Inspector," she demanded. "It can't be. Ewing was a dear, and nobody would do such a thing."

"I'm very much afraid it is true," said Gregory gently, "and I'm sorry to have hurt you, but you had to learn some time. You won't speak of it, will you, until we release it to the Press?"

She shook her head dumbly, the distress showing clearly in her eyes; and Gregory got up and moved quietly over to the door.

"Now you will understand," he said, "why I'm so interested in any little thing which may have a bearing on the crimes. Thank you for your help, Miss Ferris. And don't take this bad news too much to heart. I think Ewing's end must have been very quick; in fact I doubt if he knew anything about it at all."

As Gregory left the Bath & Bristol Works he had much food for thought. The distress of Margaret Ferris when she heard of Ewing's death was obviously genuine. But she had lied to him about something else. He had given her time to calm down and compose her story if she wished, and she had done so, and in doing so she had lied. She had told him she had seen Mr. Ogilvy take the duplicate key from the drawer to open the safe; and that was absurd. Without his key-ring, on which hung the original key of the safe, he could never have opened the drawer to take out the duplicate. It was, in fact, an absurd place to keep the duplicate, and he was surprised that Mr. Ogilvy had never realized his own foolishness, because he had only to lose the ring with the one key to be unable to reach the other.

CHAPTER IX

THE ETERNAL TRIANGLE

It was Janet Ogilvy, a brightly coloured apron round her ample form and a feather duster in her hand, who opened the door to Gregory. She looked at him uncertainly.

"Yes?" she asked. "Did you want to see me? I'm afraid my husband is not very well today."

Gregory handed her his card.

"I apologize for bothering you, Mrs. Ogilvy," he said, "but I would very much like a few words with him if it's possible. You see, I'm trying to find out who burgled the desk in his office."

Mrs. Ogilvy held her ground in the doorway.

"My husband has a dreadful headache this morning, Inspector," she objected. "He's never had such a thing before, and I say it must be something to do with that wicked man who struck him in Whitemore Road. I just don't know what our streets are coming to these days."

"I'm very sorry to hear it," said Gregory with sympathy. "But my business is rather important. Perhaps you could help me yourself, Mrs. Ogilvy?"

"I?" she said, surprised. "I'm sure I don't know anything about his office. I always say a woman's place is in her own home once she's married. But I can spare you a few minutes, so if you think I can be of any assistance without bothering my husband, then come away in."

She led the way to the little white-enamelled drawing-room, gay with flowers and sweet with their scent, and neat and clean as only loving care could make it. Gregory sensed that this room was no show place, to which only formal callers were taken. It had a warm and friendly atmosphere, and for all its neatness was clearly much lived in.

"What perfectly lovely flowers," commented Gregory as he settled himself in a chintz-covered arm-chair. "Are you both keen gardeners, Mrs. Ogilvy?"

"Yes indeed," she answered, glowing with pleasure. "But the border carnations are James's special pride. He won't have any but the clove scented, and that does make such a difference in the house. I leave the carnation bed entirely to James, and he has taken ever so many prizes in our summer show. I'd like you to see the garden, if you've time."

Gregory smiled, and shook his head.

"Not this morning, I'm afraid," he said. "I've such a lot to do."

"Oh yes, of course, you wanted to ask about James's desk. Well, there's one thing I can tell you, Inspector, and it's this. If you want to find out anything about the works there's no need to bother my husband. Ask Mr. Muir. I'm sure Jimmy could tell you all you need to know. I always tell James he should take more rest and holidays himself, and leave more work to Jimmy. But he never will listen to me. Have you met Mr. Muir, Inspector?"

"Yes, I have, and he's helped me a lot," said Gregory. "I should imagine he's quite able to look after everything in your husband's absence."

"Of course he is," declared Janet Ogilvy stoutly. "And Jimmy's such a nice lad, Inspector, only, of course, he needs a mother, or a wife, to look after him."

"He's young," said Gregory with a smile, "and has plenty of time yet for finding a wife."

"Maybe, Inspector, maybe," said Janet Ogilvy. "But Jimmy takes life seriously, Inspector, and it'll be the same when he chooses a wife. He'll not just take the first girl that comes along, nor the second either, and if he's crossed then I wouldn't like to answer for him. I had thought," she went on rather wistfully, "that perhaps that girl of James's, Margaret Somebody-or-other—— But Jimmy's been different lately, and I hear she's been going about with that young Charles Danbury, useless baggage that he is. Not that I've anything against his father, mind you, for Walter's been a very good friend to James. Anyway, if the girl's a flighty young flibbertigibbet of that sort, she'd be no wife for Jimmy."

Gregory glanced surreptitiously at the French clock on the mantelpiece.

"Well," he said, "I suppose I ought to go back again to Mr. Muir. But it's a pity, because I've a train to catch, and

haven't much time. You are sure I couldn't see your husband just for a few minutes? I would at least like to congratulate him on his carnations."

Mrs. Ogilvy relented. "Perhaps it would be all right, just for a moment," she said. "But you must promise not to tire him."

She led him along a passage to Mr. Ogilvy's study.

"James," she said, "Inspector Gregory is so interested in your lovely flowers, and I thought you'd like to show him the blooms in here. He's promised not to stay long."

Mr. Ogilvy winced as he made a move to rise from a deep leather chair.

"It's my sinus, Inspector," he explained, "and I think I owe it to that fellow who gave me a crack on the head. The doctor's say something about the nasal passages being blocked."

But he seemed to forget his pain as he warmed to the subject of his favourite hobby, and for the second time that morning Gregory had a feeling of mental indigestion, as he listened to a discourse on soil treatment and drainage and pests, in terms which he did not understand in the least. Janet Ogilvy softly closed the door on the two men, content that her husband had found something to take his mind off his affliction.

"But you didn't come here to discuss flowers, Inspector," said Mr. Ogilvy at length, lying back in his chair and closing his eyes wearily. "Have you found Ewing's murderer yet?"

"I'm afraid not, sir," answered Gregory. "But there are one or two more questions I'd like to ask if you feel well enough."

"Please ask them," said Mr. Ogilvy, "I'm not as bad as all that."

"Well, sir, I wanted to speak of the night you were attacked and robbed in Whitemore Road. Tell me, sir, do you ever carry important papers with you when you leave your office?"

"Very seldom," said Mr. Ogilvy.

"But when you do, would you carry them in an attache case, or on your person, say in your wallet?"

"Oh, in an attache case, of course. My wallet was quite small, and only meant for such things as treasury notes and visiting-cards. Naturally, I sometimes kept other things in it, such as a personal letter that I might wish to deal with at

home. In point of fact there was one letter in it the night the wallet was stolen, but it was of no significance."

"Would you mind telling me about the letter, sir?"

"Certainly. It was from a Mr. van Arlberg, making a tentative inquiry as to whether my firm could help him in a certain business project."

"Would you tell me who he is, sir? Would he be the gentleman who called at your office on the eleventh of the month?"

Mr. Ogilvy looked at him sharply, and winced as a stabbing pain shot through his forehead.

"How did you hear of that?" he asked.

"Mr. Muir told me of his visit, sir," said Gregory simply.

"Oh, I see. Yes, that is the man. He's an American, but for many years he's been a mining engineer in South Africa, and very successful, too, I believe. Recently he has become interested in an oil-refining project in Central Europe, and it was in that connection that he wrote to me. His letter was quite informal and exploratory, and as a matter of fact had been in my wallet ever since I received it some weeks earlier. His official communications with my firm are of course in my secretary's files."

"I wonder if you could give me his address, sir?"

"Yes, he's staying at the Frobisher Hotel in Mayfair. He has an office address in Fenchurch Avenue: I forget the number, but my secretary can give it to you."

"Thank you, sir, I'll ask her, if I may. I suppose the first letter, being informal, was written from his hotel?"

"No, it was written before he landed in this country. I forget where he wrote from, Wiener Neustadt, I think."

"Never mind, sir: if the letter was of no significance, then the address from which it was written cannot matter. I'd really been wondering if you were in the habit of carrying important papers on your person. It might have provided another motive for your misfortune. I believe you are a great walker, sir?"

"I am," said Mr. Ogilvy firmly. "A man must keep fit somehow, Inspector, and my work gives me little chance of other exercise."

"So that when you walked home from St. Cedric's Hall it was quite a normal thing to do? Tell me, sir, did many people know you were attending the meeting?"

"Hundreds. I'm the treasurer of the Association, and I was supporting the candidate on the platform."

"I see. I suppose you cannot remember who actually saw you leave the hall on foot?"

Mr. Ogilvy wrinkled his brow.

"I couldn't be sure. I know I'd been talking to Mr. Dynant, our chairman, and Dick Bembridge the secretary, but there were others there too."

"I suppose no one accompanied you part of the way home?"

"No. Dynant and Bembridge had their cars; and so had the others, no doubt."

"It was a great pity you had no chance to sight your assailant, sir, but then one never does, for a thug always strikes from behind."

Mr. Ogilvy wearily passed his hand across his brow, as he strove to stir his memory.

"Nevertheless there's something I've been trying to remember, Inspector," he said. "I've tried again and again, but it always escapes me."

"Something about the man?" prompted Gregory hopefully. "If you caught even a glimpse of him it would help. We should at least know whether we were looking for a big man or a small one."

Mr. Ogilvy shook his head.

"No," he said, "I never set eyes on him. It was something quite different, and I cannot recall it. I expect it's unimportant."

Gregory thanked Mr. Ogilvy for his help, and set out to make his last inquiry before leaving the city. He reflected that he just had time for an interview before Mr. Danbury went out to lunch.

He found that the *Straightforward* offices in Charles Street were not far from the Bath & Bristol Works, though in a different road. The building was old and solid. A worn flight of stone steps led him up to the door; and the first floor, to which he was taken in a lift, was cool and dark, and stone-flagged. Walter Danbury's office, with its thick soft carpet and deep leather chairs, was a marked contrast.

Danbury's welcome was polite and friendly.

"Good morning, Inspector," he said, glancing again at

the card which had been handed to him. "I don't think I've ever been honoured by a visit from a Scotland Yard officer before. What can I do for you?"

Gregory took the chair that was offered him, and at Danbury's invitation filled his pipe.

"The city police asked for our help in connection with the trouble at the Bath and Bristol Works," he answered. "As I expect you know, sir, their watchman has been missing since the night of the robbery, and the Yard is quite often asked to help in such a case. When a man bolts, he gets beyond the reach of his own city police."

"I don't think I can give you much help there," said Danbury slowly. "What was the fellow's name? Ewing, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Ewing, sir. But to tell you the truth I didn't want to worry you about him. I wanted to speak about the political meeting in St. Cedric's Hall on the eleventh. I believe you took Mr. Ogilvy to the meeting in your car, didn't you?"

"Yes, he and Mrs. Ogilvy had supper with me first. She didn't come on to the meeting, though. I dropped her at their home on the way."

"Had he planned to return with you by car?"

"No. In fact, I never asked him until Charles and I were just driving away from the hall. Charles is my son, by the way. I offered James a lift then, just as a matter of form, but I never expected him to take it, and he didn't."

"Did you leave before he did, sir?"

"Yes, but I don't suppose he'd have been long in following."

"I suppose you didn't happen to notice who he was talking to when you left?"

"Some of the committee. May I know why you are so interested, Inspector?"

"Yes, certainly. I'm trying to find anyone who saw him leave the hall on foot."

"Are you suggesting," asked Danbury sharply, "that the attack in Whitemore Road was deliberate, and aimed at James Ogilvy in particular?"

"I'm not suggesting anything, sir. But when a man is robbed, first in the streets and then in his office, all in a matter of a few days, it's a possibility one cannot ignore."

"No, one cannot," agreed Danbury in a grave tone, "and to tell you the truth, I've been thinking about that myself.

But if you have that in mind, I'm afraid you won't gain much by tracing the people who saw him leave the hall on foot."

"Why is that, sir?"

"Because James always prefers to walk rather than travel by car, and anyone who knows anything about him knows that. Hundreds of people must have known he was attending the meeting, and hundreds more must have seen him on the platform. Any of those people who knew him could confidently have predicted, not only that he'd walk home, but also the route that he'd take. I'm afraid you are tackling a big job, Inspector."

"So it seems," said Gregory ruefully. "I hadn't realized it would be as bad as that, although Mr. Muir—or was it the secretary, Miss Ferris?—has told me that Mr. Ogilvy is a great walker. I don't think Mr. Muir was at the meeting himself, was he?"

"Muir? Good God, no. At least, I don't know; I shouldn't think so. I should imagine Muir would be more likely to follow some wild-cat, extremist faction than settle down to sober domestic politics."

"He's been helpful to me," said Gregory casually, "but I should think he'd be a difficult man to get to know at all well. I can't help feeling I've met him somewhere before."

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," observed Danbury in a non-committal voice, and Gregory looked at him curiously.

"Why do you say that, sir?" he asked. "Ought I to know him?"

"I've no idea," said Danbury drily. "I only said I shouldn't be surprised if you'd come across him before."

Gregory gazed thoughtfully out of the window, weighing up his next step.

"I don't want to embarrass you, sir," he said after a while, "but if you can help me I shall be very grateful."

Danbury said nothing. He was jabbing viciously at his blotter with a pencil.

"If there's nothing wrong," persisted Gregory quietly, "then you need have no fear of telling me. On the other hand, if something is wrong, then it's surely your duty, sir, as a law-abiding citizen, to give me your assistance. You need have no qualms about that either, because if something is wrong I shall find it out anyway, in due course; but your

help now would save me much valuable time and perhaps prevent worse things from happening."

Danbury glanced at him with a wry smile.

"If I'm to tell you anything, Inspector," he said, "there's one thing which you must understand first. There's no love lost between Muir and myself, and that fact may colour my opinions. I think our dislike is mutual and instinctive, and now it's aggravated by the eternal triangle. Not myself, of course," he laughed, "but my boy and Miss Ferris whom you've met, and Muir. I'm afraid Muir's nose is out of joint, and I think it's inflamed his already low opinion of the Danbury family, father and son alike. His attitude in recent weeks certainly hasn't increased my liking for him."

"Thank you," said Gregory. "It's generous of you to tell me that, sir."

Danbury touched a bell, and presently one of his assistants brought a large file of papers into the room and laid it on the desk.

"I ought also to make it clear," said Danbury, as he slowly turned the pages, "that this is ancient history. But, nevertheless, I've begun to feel uneasy about the Bath and Bristol. I'm a close friend of James Ogilvy, and quite frequently go to the works to take him out to lunch, and occasionally for a round of golf: so I know something about the firm."

He had now found the paper he was searching for, and he looked up again at Gregory.

"I'm a friend of James Ogilvy," he went on, "but I'm also a journalist, and as such I keep my eyes open. Naturally, I meet Muir in the works from time to time, and I've asked him a few casual questions. His answers have increased my doubts."

"Does Mr. Ogilvy know this?" asked Gregory.

"No." Danbury smiled. "He thinks the world of Jimmy Muir, and it would be a waste of time to tell him. You remember the World League of Emancipated Youth, Inspector?"

"I've every reason to," said Gregory. "It was outlawed some years ago for seditious activities."

Danbury nodded. "We had a branch of it here, of course," he said, "and world anarchy was the theme, just as it was everywhere else." He handed the file across to Gregory. "That was a draft from one of our reporters, and having regard to the law of libel you can understand why we didn't print it.

Our man dug up the story soon after Muir joined the staff of the Bath and Bristol."

Gregory took the file, and read the long typewritten column. It reported that Mr. James Muir, who had recently become associated with the Bath & Bristol Precision Instrument Company, had earlier been a prominent member of the World League of Emancipated Youth. It seemed that at a massed meeting of the League held in Glasgow a few years previously Mr. Muir, then a young engineering student, had delivered an impassioned and inflammatory address, and extracts from his speech were given. Muir's words as quoted were certainly deplorable, but to Gregory's wise and experienced eyes they were little different from those of many other idealistic young men and women of that time, when the League still had not stepped right outside the bounds of propriety. On the other hand, the reporter's description of Muir as a viper settled in the city's midst was pure dynamite, and Gregory felt a wave of sympathy for an editor who had to curb and control such irresponsible nonsense.

"That's very interesting, sir," said Gregory, handing back the file. "I had, of course, no idea that Mr. Muir had been connected with the League. But as you say, it's old history. Have you any reason to suppose that the League has been reborn?"

Danbury hesitated. "No," he said finally. "I cannot say that. What is it, Inspector, that warns us of impending trouble? Some kind of sixth sense, I suppose."

Gregory waited patiently whilst his host lighted a cigarette.

"You must know much more about this than I do," Danbury went on, "but it's my experience that when you outlaw such an organization as the League, you do not destroy the seeds of it. They remain underground, and if the soil is fertile a new plant will grow up in time, probably under a different name."

"And you think that has happened in the case of the League?"

Danbury shrugged his shoulders. "I'm simply not prepared to answer that," he said. "I can only tell you this. All journalists at heart are detectives: they must be, it's their job, and I'm not different from the others. I'm not happy about the Bath and Bristol. There's something wrong at those works. You know that yourself, for otherwise you wouldn't

be down here, nor asking me all these questions. As for Muir himself, I know nothing whatever against him. But I see him quite frequently, and the man has changed a lot. In my own opinion, which may be worthless, the fellow's got something to hide." Danbury looked his visitor squarely in the eye. "I don't enjoy speaking of a man in this way," he went on gravely, "when he isn't here to defend himself. My instinct and judgment are telling me to keep an eye on Muir, but I want to make it perfectly clear that I haven't a single shred of evidence to justify my suspicions."

There was a knock on the door, and a tall young man strode into the room without waiting for an answer. He paused, however, when he saw that Danbury had a visitor.

"I'm sorry, Dad," he said pleasantly. "I didn't know you were engaged."

"Come in, Charles," said his father. "You may be able to help us."

He introduced Gregory to his son, and Gregory found himself looking into a pair of frank and fearless eyes. He liked the look of this young fellow with the clear-cut features and healthy, tanned complexion.

"Charles," went on Walter Danbury, "do you remember the meeting in St. Cedric's Hall the other night? The inspector was wondering who James Ogilvy was talking to when we offered him a lift home."

Charles thought deeply: then he shook his head. "I wasn't taking much notice," he said. "I believe I saw Dick, oh yes, and old Dynant was there too. Why, does it matter, Dad?"

"I don't think it does," said his father lightly. "You didn't notice your rival at the meeting, did you?"

Charles grinned. "What, the saturnine Jimmy? No, I don't think so." Then he hesitated, and looked at his father. "I'm not sure, Dad," he went on slowly. "There was somebody at the back of the hall——" He stopped, and shook his head again. "No, I really couldn't tell you. I wasn't thinking about Jimmy, and so I don't suppose I'd have noticed him anyway."

"It doesn't matter, sir," said Gregory. He saw from the clock that it must already be far past the normal lunch-time of these two, and he picked up his hat. "Your father can assure you," he added with a smile, "that I didn't come here to inquire into the movements of Mr. Muir."

CHAPTER X

APPARATUS 'K'

As Gregory sat in the train which carried him to London, he reviewed the happenings of the last twenty-four hours. He felt sympathy for the city police in their task: they had no clue to guide them either towards Mr. Ogilvy's assailant or Ewing's murderer, and their main but slender hope now lay in tracing the car which must have carried Ewing's body from the works out into the country.

Gregory himself, however, was in a happier position. Not only had a considerable field of inquiry opened up before him, but his interview with Mr. Ogilvy that morning had shown two possible motives for the attack in the streets, and either or both of these might conceivably have led to the second crime.

Who was Mr. van Arlberg, whose interest had switched from mining engineering to oil refineries, and whose letter had been in the stolen wallet? Had the assailant really wanted that letter? Mr. Ogilvy had said it was innocuous, but Gregory wondered if, in the light of all that had happened, he would agree about this if he could read it. Perhaps the place of origin of the letter had suddenly assumed a new significance, and it had become important to destroy the evidence of van Arlberg's connection with it. It seemed that the history and recent movements of van Arlberg, who had come to this country from central Europe, required investigation, and Gregory's thoughts involuntarily turned to the stranger who had landed at The Flats in the beginning of the month.

Another point which Gregory had not earlier appreciated was that Mr. Ogilvy was carrying his key-ring at the time of the attack, and that on the ring was the main key of his safe. It was true that the key had not been stolen, but it had been dragged from his pocket and an impression of it might have been taken: there had been ample time between the first crime and the second to make another key from an impression.

But why should anyone take so much trouble and risk if they knew where the duplicate key was kept? It was the one firm assumption of the city police, and in view of the facts as known it seemed beyond argument, that the drawer of Mr. Ogilvy's desk had been broken open to gain access to the duplicate key. Now Gregory found himself wondering if that really was so. Perhaps Mr. Ogilvy's assailant had no knowledge of the duplicate key: it was even possible that there were two separate gangs who desired to examine the papers in the safe.

Gregory was no longer dismayed by the large number of people who might conceivably have planned and carried out the attack in the streets. He felt sure that if the attack was in any way connected with the subsequent robbery and murder, then it must have been planned by someone who was closely associated with Mr. Ogilvy, either in business or otherwise, and that limited Gregory's interest to a reasonably small number. He had discussed the matter with Wildish before leaving the city, and the superintendent had undertaken to trace the movements of several persons on the evening of the 11th of June, subsequent to the political meeting, first and most prominent amongst these being the unsatisfactory Muir and Miss Ferris.

Gregory was puzzled by the attitude of the works manager and the secretary. It was clear that both of these two had something to hide, and the girl had lied to him. He could not, however, think of any reason why Muir should wish to gain access to the safe in such dramatic fashion: the details of all the firm's apparatus, both Admiralty and otherwise, must already be fully known to him, and anyway, if he wished to see the papers, he had surely only to ask Mr. Ogilvy for them. As for the girl, Gregory felt convinced that whatever part she might have played, she had been innocent of all knowledge of the murder. He felt puzzled, too, by the antagonism between Muir and the two Danburys. That the eternal triangle played its part in this as Walter Danbury had suggested, seemed more than likely, but Gregory felt sure that the mutual suspicion and antagonism were more deeply rooted. Walter Danbury was interested in Muir's past connection with the World League of Emancipated Youth, and had evidently questioned him on the subject. Certainly questions of one kind or another had been asked, because Muir also had spoken of

them, and it was interesting to note that in referring to them each man, wilfully or otherwise, had contrived to cast suspicion on the other.

Yet another matter closely concerned Gregory's attention. Despite Mr. Ogilvy's stout assertion to the contrary, the Admiralty apparatus had indeed recently come again into the limelight, and that on the 11th of June. It was on that day that Brancaster had called to discuss mass production, and a long conference had been held in Mr. Ogilvy's office, a conference which had also been attended by Evan Davies, the shop foreman.

Gregory's main interest might at present concern Muir and Miss Ferris, but it was not only their movements on the night of the 11th of June that he had asked Superintendent Wildish to trace. The two Danburys, father and son, were also to be accorded that honour, as were Dynant and Bembridge, who had been speaking to Mr. Ogilvy on the pavement outside St. Cedric's Hall. Evan Davies, too, had a place on the superintendent's list, and so had Brancaster and van Arlberg: both of the latter had stated their intention of leaving the city early in the afternoon, but the fact that they had actually done so needed confirmation.

On arrival in London, Gregory went first to Scotland Yard. If he was investigating a crime of national importance, the antecedents of the principal characters in the drama might be illuminating, and he asked that any known facts about these people should be gathered together with all speed and sent to him. Not even Mr. Ogilvy and his wife were to be spared the attention. Gregory had learned enough from Walter Danbury and Muir and Miss Ferris to think that the atmosphere of crime and suspicion which now hung as a cloud around the Bath & Bristol Precision Instrument Works had been gathering for some while, and surely Mr. Ogilvy could not have failed to become aware of it. What if Mr. Ogilvy himself had something to hide, and had realized that suspicion was beginning to rest on him? Desperate men take desperate measures, and it would not be the first time that a hunted man, with the help of an accomplice, had staged an attack upon himself, nor a burglary of his own premises.

After asking the Yard further to inquire, as a matter of urgency, into any possible rebirth of the League of Emanci-

pated Youth, Gregory set out for a hurried supper before his meeting with the sailors.

At five minutes to nine, when he entered the Admiralty building, he learned that it was not the Director of Naval Intelligence who expected him, but no less a man than the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff. He was taken up to the first floor, to a large airy room, sparsely furnished, whose wide-open windows let in the warm evening scent of flowers and newly-cut grass in St. James's Park. Admiral Sir Robert Braithwaite was seated at the head of an oval table, and with him were three other men. Despite their plain clothes, Gregory could tell at a glance that all of them were sailors, and indeed the Director of Naval Intelligence, Captain Laidlaw, the big and heavily-built man whose benevolent appearance was so deceptive, was already known to him. The others were introduced as Captain Manwaring, the Director of Anti-Submarine Warfare, and Commander Dryden on his staff.

"Gentlemen," said the Admiral, when Gregory had taken his place at the table, "you are all aware of the reason for this meeting, but I would like to give you my own summary of the situation. There are indications that certain very secret apparatus which is being constructed for the Director of Anti-Submarine Warfare may be compromised. I want you to understand that there is no clear proof of this. I want you also to understand that I am not in the habit of chasing shadows. But this particular apparatus is of such vital importance that we cannot possibly take the matter too seriously. Before asking Inspector Gregory to tell you exactly what has happened at the Bath and Bristol Works, I think that for his benefit we should explain the importance of the apparatus, and the way in which it is being made. Perhaps, Manwaring, you would explain this."

Captain Geoffrey Manwaring looked absurdly young, thought Gregory, for the rank he held.

"The importance is simply this," said Manwaring. "The apparatus will enable us to develop an entirely new system for the hunting, detection, and destruction of submarines; and if the gear comes up to our expectations we shall be able to say that the submarine danger, at the present moment, is no longer a vital menace. An antidote can of course be found in time by any possible enemy, once he knows our methods;

but if we can maintain a sufficiently long lead we can develop a new technique while he is still perfecting the antidote to the old.

"The apparatus," he went on, "is being made by private contract. The main body of the gear is being constructed by Messrs. John Ryder, the big electrical engineers in the north midlands. A subsidiary part, a certain modulator panel, is being made by the Bath and Bristol Precision Instrument Company. Both of these firms are well known to us, and both did a great deal of work of a highly-secret nature for us during the war. Each firm is expert in the part it is making; and the divided contract gives added security because each component, taken individually, would tell an enemy very little."

"You mean, sir," asked Gregory, "that if one, but only one, of the components has been compromised, then no great harm has yet been done?"

"That is so," answered Manwaring. "But if the other is compromised too, then it will become a very serious matter indeed."

"And may I ask another question, sir? I hope it won't sound interfering, but it may have some bearing on the matter. Under what circumstances do you place such contracts with private firms, instead of making the apparatus in the Admiralty's own establishments?"

"In this case it's a question of mass production. At present we have only four sets made for trial. But if they prove as successful as we hope, then we shall at once require mass production to install the gear in the whole fleet, and that would be far beyond the capacity of our establishments. We want the firms which will do the main work to gain the early experience. From the security point of view, we have every reason for complete faith in the discretion of firms such as these, just as surely as in our own people."

The Admiral looked up at Gregory and nodded. "That was a good point to clear up at the start," he said. "Is there anything else you want to know about the manufacture of the gear? Then perhaps you will briefly tell the meeting what has happened at the Bath and Bristol Works."

Inspector Gregory spoke of the attack on Mr. Ogilvy and the burglary of his desk, and the subsequent finding of the night watchman's murdered body.

"There's nothing definite," he went on, "to link the attack on Mr. Ogilvy with the other crime, but I think it's suggestive."

"Very," agreed the Admiral drily.

"The main point of my story," concluded Gregory, "concerns the finding of the body, which clearly raises the burglary far above the limits of petty theft. The only thing of real value in the drawer that was broken open was the duplicate key of the director's safe, which contains the firm's confidential specifications, including the Admiralty modulator panel. I cannot, however, say that the safe was actually opened, and if it was, I could not say that the Admiralty papers were examined. None of the specifications are missing, but they could have been examined and copied, or photographed."

"For purposes of security," said the Admiral bluntly, "it is only prudent to assume that they were examined."

Captain Manwaring was looking puzzled. "But," he objected, "surely this is putting the cart before the horse. If anyone wanted information about Apparatus 'K' they would go first to John Ryder's, not to the Bath and Bristol. John Ryder's specifications and blue prints, though not very illuminating when taken by themselves, do at least mean something. But the modulator panel might be part of many things: nobody would go for that first."

"Don't be too sure, Geoffrey," said the Director of Naval Intelligence quietly. "Our unknown friend may have stumbled across the Bath and Bristol contract quite by accident, without any knowledge of John Ryder's part in the scheme of things. However, he'd know about that now, I should imagine. Wouldn't there be some reference to Ryder's in the specifications held by the Bath and Bristol?"

Manwaring's bronzed face turned a shade paler.

"By God, yes," he said softly. "We shall have to set a guard on John Ryder's."

The Director of Naval Intelligence nodded his head. "We shall," he said simply.

"I've taken the liberty of doing that already," put in Gregory. "I arranged it by telephone last night, and I'm going up to Mantringham myself tomorrow, to make sure that everything's in order."

"Thank you, Inspector," said the Admiral. "I'm grateful for that. If we were going to do anything at all, we couldn't

move too quickly. Tell me, Manwaring, what is the present state of Apparatus 'K'?"

"There haven't been any delays, sir, and the installation in the four ships is finished. They'll be carrying out harbour tests in the beginning of next week, and we hope to send them out for full trials at sea a week or ten days after that, depending of course on how the gear behaves in the harbour tests."

"I see," said the Admiral. "Am I not right in thinking that even if an enemy had detailed knowledge of the apparatus, he would still wish to know how we actually use the thing before he could devise an effective antidote?"

"Yes, sir, within limits that is true," answered Manwaring. "There are two or three ways in which it might be used, thanks to the wide frequency-range of the modulator panel, and an enemy would want to see for himself the tactics we employed."

"In fact," said the Admiral, "he would want to see the trials. I suppose, D.N.I., that you've got strict security measures designed to cover that?"

"It's all arranged, sir. But under the circumstances I'd be glad of Inspector Gregory's help as well."

"Can you do anything about that, Inspector?" asked the Admiral.

"Yes, certainly, sir," answered Gregory. "Perhaps I could make some arrangements with Captain Laidlaw after this meeting. Will any special measures be needed for the harbour tests?"

"No," said Manwaring, intervening. "It's only the trials at sea that matter. In the harbour tests we simply run up the machines and check voltage and current outputs, and things of that sort."

There was a prolonged silence in the room whilst the Admiral, deep in thought, drew pictures of improbable wild-fowl on his blotter. Young John Dryden, the only officer who had so far taken no part in the discussion, gazed out through the open window into the warm summer dusk: it seemed to him incongruous that they should be discussing murder and worse on such a beautiful evening.

At last the Admiral spoke again.

"Do you happen to know, Manwaring," he asked, "how long it would take a foreign country, with full knowledge of

Apparatus 'K' in their hands, to devise the antidote, and make it effective throughout their submarine service? How long, for instance, is it going to take to complete the necessary reconstruction of our own submarines?"

"I'd like Commander Dryden to answer that, sir," said Manwaring. "He's been keeping in touch with the Flag Officer (Submarines) for me, as well as with Ryder's and the Bath and Bristol, ever since the apparatus was designed."

"I understand, sir, that it's going to take us two years," said Dryden, "but I expect the time could be shortened in an emergency."

"I've no doubt it could," agreed the Admiral. "For one thing, we are keeping half the submarines in service all the time."

"Yes, sir, if we withdrew them all at once, as other countries might, the modifications could be finished by this time next year, so long as dockyard facilities were adequate. Actually, I understand that the only fully satisfactory answer from the submarine point of view is new construction, not reconstruction, but I gather that our own modifications will give a submarine nearly equal chances against Apparatus 'K' in its present form."

"Quite so," said the Admiral. He drummed irritably on the table with his fingers, and then he turned to Gregory.

"I suppose you haven't any kind of a line on the fellow who went to the Bath and Bristol?" he asked.

"None at all, sir," Gregory answered. "But there's another matter which might possibly have a bearing on it. At the beginning of the month, a few days before the trouble at the Bath and Bristol Works began, an unknown man landed at night from a darkened vessel at an isolated place on the east coast. There isn't any reason to connect him with the things that have happened since, but he still needs explaining. He chose an expensive and dramatic way of landing, and one which held a lot of risk."

"Meaning that the fellow might have been a spy?" asked the Admiral.

"It's possible, sir. At all events we haven't yet been able to account for him in any other way."

"And he may have come to get the specifications of our apparatus. But that's absurd. One doesn't import a spy to

steal the plans: the fellow on the spot would do that, and export the plans. Surely that's right, D.N.I.?"

"It would be much more likely," said Captain Laidlaw, "unless there are special and peculiar circumstances."

"I'm not sure that there aren't peculiar circumstances, sir," said Dryden slowly. "I'm afraid I've not got my ideas very clear yet, so I may explain this badly. In the ordinary way I suppose one would steal the blue prints, or whatever it was one wanted, and send them straight to one's own country. But this is rather different. Apparatus 'K' embodies revolutionary principles, and if I was a spy and appreciated the importance of the gear at all, I think I should realize that incomplete facts could be misleading. I'd want to keep in touch with the development of the gear, and above all I'd want data from the trials at sea. And if I wasn't a specialist in that way myself, I think I should ask for an expert to be sent from home to help me interpret my knowledge."

"In which case," said the Admiral, "if the fellow who landed on the east coast was concerned with Apparatus 'K', he wouldn't have been a spy at all. He'd have been some kind of technical man. Is that what you mean?"

"Something like that, sir," answered Dryden.

"Then I can't understand why he should land in such a damned silly way," said the Admiral. "Why couldn't he cross from Calais or Dieppe or somewhere in comfort?"

"Because he's already known in this country, sir," said Gregory. "I think we can say that with certainty, whatever he may have come for. He was afraid we should recognize him and send him back, or apprehend him, or at the very least keep a watchful eyes on his movements while he was over here."

"So we don't know who we are looking for, nor even what country he represents. That's not so easy," said the Admiral. "Now then, D.N.I., are we aware that any foreign country in particular is specially interested in our anti-submarine developments at the present moment? Don't forget that where we are concerned the submarine is traditionally the weapon of the weaker maritime power. You must consider small countries as well as powerful ones."

"A lot of people are always interested, sir," said Laidlaw, "but I'm not aware of anything abnormal."

The Admiral was leaning back in his chair gazing fixedly at the Intelligence Officer. A new glint had come into the Admiral's eyes, and his jaw had taken the determined set which had been so well known on the bridge of his flagship.

"Laidlaw," he said, "there's something here we can get hold of. The inspector spoke of the man who landed on the east coast being well known to us. Very well. That suggests that he's something of a public figure, as well as a technical expert. Now, if some well-known man has suddenly disappeared from public life in his own country, or is known to be cruising in a yacht near these coasts, don't you think the fact may have been noticed by one of your intelligence people? He might not think it worth reporting if he didn't know the significance of it, but I suppose you can get in touch with them all and ask them, can't you?"

There was now a new light in Laidlaw's eyes also. "It's not easy, sir," he said, "but I think I can get you an answer, and perhaps the right one."

"Good," said the Admiral. Then he turned to Gregory. "I think you said you proposed to go up to Mantringham yourself tomorrow, didn't you?"

"Yes, sir. As I see it, the first essential thing is to ensure that the trouble at the Bath and Bristol Works doesn't spread."

"I agree. And I think it would be a very good plan if I sent a naval officer with you, for his technical knowledge might be of assistance to you. He would be in plain clothes, of course. What do you think about it, Manwaring?"

"I think Dryden should go, sir. He's been one of the moving spirits behind this apparatus from the beginning, and he knows both of the firms pretty well. He'll have to be in Plymouth for the harbour tests next week, but there's plenty of time for that."

"Very well," said the Admiral. "Then that is settled."

CHAPTER XI

THE SHADOW ON THE THRESHOLD

On the following morning, whilst Inspector Gregory and John Dryden were on their way to Mantringham, Charles Danbury walked into his father's office carrying a slip of paper in his hand.

"What exactly are we going to do about this murder, Dad?" asked Charles.

"Well, we shall have to carry it in this week's issue, of course," said Walter Danbury gloomily. "Do you know why the police suppressed the news when they found the body?"

"No," replied Charles, "but I suppose they were hoping to gain time."

His father stared out of the window, apparently lost in thought.

"It's a damnable business," he observed irritably.

"What is?" asked Charles in an innocent tone, "the murder, or *Straightforward* having to carry the news?"

"Both," snapped his father, "and don't be facetious, Charles. You know perfectly well that *Straightforward* doesn't fill its columns with murder stories. However, we shall have to carry this one, because we can't ignore a thing of that sort when it concerns a firm like the Bath and Bristol."

"That's just what I was thinking myself," said Charles, not at all abashed by the rebuke. "Oughtn't we to send someone round for news?"

"Yes, I suppose we'd better," said his father slowly. "Who were you thinking of sending?"

"I thought Paul would be the right man for the job," said Charles.

Walter Danbury took a cigarette from his case and lit it very deliberately.

"You can send Paul to see the superintendent," he said at length, "though I doubt if he'll learn much from him. But I think I'll go round to the Bath and Bristol myself."

Charles raised his eyebrows, but said nothing.

"You think it's odd that I should go?" asked his father. "I don't see anything very surprising in it. James Ogilvy has looked on me as one of his closest friends for years, and I don't think he'd mind talking to me in the least. But I do think he might resent the intrusion of one of our reporters."

"Very well, Dad," said Charles, turning towards the door. "I'll go and mobilize Paul. If anyone can extract information from Wildish, then Paul can."

Walter Danbury stubbed out his newly-lit cigarette, and then took up his hat and left the building. His mission was distasteful, and he felt he must put it behind him before attending to the rest of his day's business.

At the Bath & Bristol Works, however, he learned that Mr. Ogilvy was out, and he asked if he might see the secretary instead.

Margaret Ferris got up from her chair with a smile of welcome.

"I'm afraid Mr. Ogilvy won't be back for another half-hour," she said. "Is there any message I can give him? I don't suppose you would care to wait so long."

"As a matter of fact," said Walter Danbury, "I came to express my sympathy for this dreadful tragedy that's happened. You've heard of it, of course? Perhaps you'd tell Mr. Ogilvy how sorry I am."

Margaret's face clouded.

"You mean about poor Ewing. Yes, Mr. Danbury, I knew yesterday morning. It's really too terrible to think about."

"It is," agreed Danbury. "And I think it's very hard on Mr. Ogilvy, coming so soon after his own misfortune, and then the burglary of his desk. But I suppose the burglary and the murder were all part of the same crime."

"Oh, I think they must have been. I suppose Ewing heard a noise in Mr. Ogilvy's office, and came up to investigate, and . . . and . . ." Margaret shuddered, and stopped speaking.

"I don't suppose he knew anything about it," said Danbury gently. "It must have been a quick end, from what I hear. I suppose you don't know how the man got into the works? Was any window-catch found to have been forced back?"

Margaret shook her head. "I've no idea," she said. "I've

heard nothing like that, and I don't think the police have found anything either. I don't see that it would help us, even if we did know."

"It might," said Danbury, and when Margaret looked questioningly at him he added, "You see, as matters stand, there's nothing to show that Ewing didn't let the fellow in at the door."

Margaret's eyes opened wide. "But he'd never do that," she said. "Why ever should he? Who would he let in?"

"Some friend of his, for a cup of tea and a chat," said Danbury lightly. "You see, one always imagines that these tragedies happen in the middle of the night. But this one might have begun quite early in the evening, when there were still people about in the streets."

"Yes, I suppose in that case he might have let someone in," said Margaret doubtfully, "but he'd never have let him go to Mr. Ogilvy's office."

"Margaret, my dear," said Danbury, "you are young and trusting. You liked Ewing and trusted him. But I'm getting old and I've seen a good many unpleasant things in life. I don't like casting a doubt on Ewing now he cannot answer for himself, but we all meet temptation, and the best of us sometimes fall. Don't you think it possible that Ewing was involved in the burglary, that he opened the door to an accomplice who had a knowledge of locks, and that the other fellow hit Ewing to get his share of the money?"

"No," declared Margaret stoutly, "I just don't believe it of Ewing. Besides, there wasn't enough money in the drawer to make it worth sharing."

Danbury shrugged his shoulders. "You could hardly expect me to know that," he said, "and perhaps Ewing and his friend didn't either, till they saw it. But if the thief didn't force a window or a door, then Ewing must have let him in, and who else could it have been but a friend of his?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I hadn't thought of it before," said Margaret. "Oh, it's all so horrible, and I try to get it out of my mind, but I just can't. Yes, I suppose it must have been a friend, or at any rate someone he knew. Oh!——" Her face paled, and her voice died away, as an appalling thought struck her.

"Yes, my dear? What is it?" he asked gently.

Margaret covered her face with her hands as though to shut out an evil vision. Then she shook herself and faced Walter Danbury squarely.

"I thought of something very dreadful," she said simply, "but of course it's all nonsense really."

Walter Danbury laid his hand quietly over hers.

"Are you sure it's nonsense, my dear?" he asked. "Remember, Margaret, a man has been murdered, and there's no nonsense about that. You were thinking it might have been someone connected with the firm, someone in authority who could expect Ewing to let him in, perhaps someone with a story that he'd left something behind and come to fetch it. That was what you thought, wasn't it?"

Margaret nodded, her eyes full of horror.

"Yes," she whispered. "But it's absurd. We all love Mr. Ogilvy really, even if he is a bit fussy sometimes, and no one would touch his desk. And Ewing was a dear. Oh, it couldn't be one of ourselves, someone I see every day —"

"No, my dear, I don't expect it could," said Danbury quietly. "There's nothing to suggest it, is there? I should try to forget that horrid little thought. Let's remember that however bad things may seem, they might always be worse. It is at least a blessing that Mr. Ogilvy found nothing missing from his safe."

A shadow fell across the threshold, and Muir stepped softly into the room from Mr. Ogilvy's office.

"Why should anything be missing from the safe?" asked Muir.

For a moment Walter Danbury gazed blankly at him.

"'Morning, Muir," he said at length. "What was that you were saying?"

"I said, why should anything be missing from the safe?" repeated Muir, his hard eyes shifting from Danbury to the girl and back again.

"Why? Well, I'm sure I don't know. Indeed, you should know better than me. It's just my experience that when thieves are tempted to break open a desk they aren't inclined to ignore a safe. But it looks as though they've ignored Mr. Ogilvy's, doesn't it?"

"Yes, it looks as though they have," said Muir icily. "What can I do for you?"

"I don't know that you can do anything," said Danbury, keeping his temper with difficulty. "I've just learned about Ewing's death, and I came to express my sympathy to Mr. Ogilvy."

"He's out," snapped Muir.

"So I understand. I've left a message with his secretary. Has it occurred to you, Muir, that now the news about Ewing has been released you'll have a lot of newspaper reporters round here worrying your firm?"

"And you are the first of the gang?" asked Muir sneeringly.

"I'm the first of the gang," repeated Danbury in a level voice. "You can believe it or not, but I've come here as a friend of James Ogilvy, and chiefly to tell him I'm sorry."

"And secondly to get his story?"

"And secondly to get any information he chose to give me," corrected Danbury. "My newspaper, at least, won't embarrass him by sending a reporter. But I didn't think he'd mind talking to me, had he been here: and if you are honest with yourself, Muir, I think you'll acknowledge that."

Danbury picked up his hat, and moved towards the door.

"He couldn't have told you anything, anyway," said Muir. "Neither can I, nor Miss Ferris. Why don't you send a man to the police?"

"I've done that, naturally," said Danbury, and then he paused in the doorway and looked back at Muir. "By the way," he added, "I met a fellow the other night who said he knew you. It was at that meeting in St. Cedric's Hall. Let me see now, what was his name? Wiggett? Willett? Yes, that was it, Willett. He said he'd known you some years ago in Scotland. Did you see him at the meeting?"

Margaret fancied that Muir had changed colour at the name of Willett, but his voice remained hard and cold when he spoke.

"I did not," he said. "Shut the door behind you."

Muir waited while Danbury gently closed the door, and then he turned to Margaret.

"Well," he said acidly, "were you and your boy-friend having a good time holding hands across the desk when I disturbed you?"

With an effort Margaret preserved her self-control.

"He'd been speaking about Ewing," she said, "and he

was being very nice. And he only took my hand when I thought of something and got very upset."

"Naturally," sneered Muir. "They always do that. And what did he want to know about the safe? Quite the amateur detectives, aren't you?"

"Oh, stop it!" blazed Margaret. "Who are you to say who's to hold my hand and who isn't? And *why* do you always look at me like that whenever the safe is mentioned?"

She stamped her foot in rage, and then her self-control finally snapped.

"Oh, Jimmy," she gasped, "I didn't do it. You know I didn't. Oh, Jimmy, you know it, you know it!"

She flung herself into a chair, buried her head in her hands on the desk, and sobbed bitterly. She thought of all the happiness that once had been coming to her, and that now was buried beneath the mismanagement and suspicion and disaster, perhaps disgrace, in which she seemed to be engulfed.

Muir stood quietly looking down on her, and a slow and enigmatic smile began to play around his lips.

The girl's sobbing ceased, and she sat up and dried her eyes, bracing herself for the question she had not previously dared to ask.

"When did you find the keys?" she said in a small voice.

"When I came in from lunch," replied Muir very quietly. "I shouldn't think about them any more if I were you."

For a long while after Muir had left the office, Margaret remained sitting at her desk, with her brain in a turmoil. She was struggling with thoughts that seemed beyond her understanding. Why was everyone so concerned about the safe? What had happened to it, and what had been found out? Little fool that she was, to have left those keys on Mr. Ogilvy's desk, and now it seemed they had lain there unguarded for a whole hour. What had happened in that hour? And how could the keys and the safe be mixed up with that dreadful murder? She was sure they must be, or people wouldn't be so interested in them. For perhaps the hundredth time she regretted her lack of moral courage. She knew she ought to have told the police about the keys. But if she had lacked the courage to tell them at the beginning, still more did she lack it now. She would no doubt be guilty of withholding important evidence; perhaps she had even become an accessory to the

crime. Anyway, the evidence would probably be too late now to be of any value.

A new resolve began to form in Margaret's mind. She must get out of this place, for she really couldn't stand it any longer. She would give notice. Her thoughts turned involuntarily to Adrian Brancaster, in whose company she had known happiness and a feeling of security. She would seek employment in Mantringham. And Jimmy, what of him? He would find some other girl, perhaps one of the little cats from her own hostel, and Margaret herself wouldn't even know. In a torment of jealousy and indecision she turned in desperation to her typewriter, and retyped a long business letter she had already completed.

CHAPTER XII

A VISIT TO MANTRINGHAM

It was early afternoon when Gregory and Dryden reached Mantringham; and there, after a brief and somewhat difficult interview with Sir William Ryder, they were led back by Brancaster to his own office.

"I'm afraid Sir William didn't take it very well," said Brancaster, "but I hope you'll make allowances. He's getting an old man, and is jealous of his firm's reputation."

"I don't blame him at all," said Gregory. "Nobody likes the feeling that their property is under police protection."

"That's exactly the trouble," Brancaster agreed. "Sir William thinks that in some way it's a reflection on the firm, and he will hate any notoriety it may cause. But I imagine your watch will be pretty discreet?"

"It will, sir. We don't want to stop the Bath and Bristol thief from coming here: we want to catch him in the act. But I'm afraid we shan't succeed in keeping it quiet altogether."

"The thing that worries me," put in Dryden, "is the possibility that the fellow may have been here already."

Brancaster looked at him curiously. "But there hasn't been a burglary here," he said.

"Are you sure of that?" asked Dryden.

"Well——" Brancaster hesitated and smiled. "No, I suppose I can't say I'm certain. But there hasn't been any sign of it, and nothing is missing so far as I'm aware."

"Perhaps not. But if the night watchman hadn't disturbed the fellow at the Bath and Bristol we probably shouldn't have known of that burglary either."

"It's a disturbing suggestion," said Brancaster slowly. "What makes you think of it?"

"Just the nature of the apparatus. If anyone wanted details, I'd expect him to get hold of your specifications before he bothered about the Bath and Bristol."

"No doubt you'd know best about that," said Brancaster. "But aren't you presupposing that your sinister friend already has a great deal of knowledge of the apparatus if he knows enough to come here first?"

"Well, perhaps he has," said Dryden doggedly. "How did he learn of the gear's existence in the first place anyway? We don't know how much he knows."

"No," agreed Brancaster, "but the inspector tells me we don't even know for certain that he's interested in your gear at all. Anyway, there's my safe, Dryden, where all your specifications are kept. You could blow it open with dynamite, no doubt, but I don't think you'd open it in any other way without the proper key, and that's in very safe keeping."

"I don't think I'd worry, Commander, if I were you," said Gregory. "We can't do more than we are doing now." He turned to Brancaster. "Tell me, sir, were you aware that there was a police watch on your works before we arrived this afternoon?"

"Quite frankly, no. You've kept the secret pretty well so far. I suppose you'll be staying here tonight to see that the dispositions of your men are correct?"

"Oh no, sir. Your own superintendent of police is handling that, and he can do it better than me. But I'd very much like to see the lay-out of the buildings just now if you can spare the time to show me."

Brancaster willing showed them all over the works, which Dryden already knew quite well, and Gregory rapidly reached two conclusions. On the one hand it would, he believed, have been easy to break into the works at night before the police watch was set. On the other, it was quite an easy building to guard.

Saying good-bye to Brancaster, they went next to the Superintendent of the city police, and with him discussed his dispositions. He asked the same question as Brancaster, would Gregory like to see for himself how the men were posted? Gregory said no, he was returning at once to the Bath & Bristol, and a railway guide was consulted. It seemed that, after a cross-country journey, they could arrive late the same evening.

"I kept on my room at the Feathers when I left yesterday," said Gregory. "I must have a base to work from. What about

you, Commander, will you stay there too? I don't think you'll have difficulty getting in."

"Would you like me to ring up and book a room for you?" offered the superintendent.

"No, thanks very much, I think I'll chance it," answered Dryden. "I'd rather they didn't know I was working with the police, especially the Mantringham police."

"I agree," said Gregory. "I think you'd better go to the Feathers independently. We can meet there tomorrow morning as casual acquaintances." He turned to the superintendent. "You could help me, though," he went on. "Would you put through a call to Wildish, and say I'd like to come and see him as soon as I arrive?"

On the way to the railway station, Gregory spoke of a matter which now had disturbed him twice.

"Tell me, Commander," he said, "you were speaking of our friend visiting Ryder's before he went to the Bath and Bristol, and Captain Manwaring said much the same yesterday: I remember he said something about the cart before the horse. Is that a reasoned fear, or just the fear of an unpleasant possibility?"

"A little of both, I think," answered Dryden. "As D.N.I. said last night, the fellow may have stumbled on the Bath and Bristol contract by accident. But if he knew anything beforehand, then I'm sure he'd go to Ryder's first—at least, he would if they'd put a big man on the job. What do you think about it yourself?"

"Technically, I'm not in a position to say," replied Gregory cautiously, "and I didn't want to alarm Mr. Brancaster and the staff at Ryder's. But I value your opinion, and I do think they've put a big man on the job."

Gregory was silent whilst they passed a small crowd gazing at a window display.

"I think this is all connected in some way with the man who landed on The Flats at the beginning of the month," he went on, "and that was something big. I'm afraid my reasoning is largely negative, just the fact that the landing doesn't fit in with anything else. But when a man has been as long in his profession as I have, he gets a little of what one might call second sight. You must know that in your own Service too."

Dryden nodded. Call it wisdom, experience, second sight or what you will, he had many times known the urge which prompts a man to meet an emergency before it is apparent, to turn and face a danger as yet unseen.

"Then you think I'm right?" he asked uneasily.

Gregory shook his head. "I don't think one way or the other," he said. "I just like keeping all the possibilities in mind. Don't think any more about Ryder's. There's no link there yet. We'll get our man if he goes there, and otherwise we'll get him through the Bath and Bristol or else at the sea trials."

"I'm sure I hope so," said Dryden, with feeling. "By the way, who is the coastguard fellow who started all this business about The Flats?"

"He's a man called James Ridd," answered Gregory.

"James Ridd?" echoed Dryden in astonishment. "Why, he's an old shipmate of mine. I heard he'd become a coastguard when he took his pension, but I didn't know he'd gone to the east coast. He's a west-countryman himself."

"You know him, sir? That's very interesting."

"Of course I know him. He was my Leading Signalman some years ago, and eventually became a Chief Yeoman."

"Well, it's becoming quite a family affair," laughed Gregory. "Now tell me, if some expert has been sent over here to interpret the specifications, as you suggested, what kind of man do you think he would be?"

"A naval officer," said Dryden promptly.

"I see. That gives me something else to work on," commented Gregory, as they passed through the big, arched entrance of the Central Station.

At eleven o'clock that night Gregory was shown into Wildish's office.

" 'Evening, Gregory," said the superintendent. "I hope you've been getting on better than I have. Allow me to show you my only clue."

He picked up a small object from his desk and handed it over. It was a little chromium-plated wood screw, and not a very new one. Part of the plating was worn off the head of it, and rust was showing.

"Where was this found?" asked Gregory, as he examined it.

"On the grass verge at the roadside, just where the car must have stopped when they disposed of Ewing's body. It's the sort of screw that's used for securing the upholstery, or the door handle, or the wooden dashboard in better-quality cars."

Gregory handed it back. "And the fact that it was found on the grass verge suggests that it was dragged there when they moved the body?" he asked.

"Yes," agreed Wildish. "On the other hand it may not have come from the murderer's car at all, and it may have been thrown up there by the wheels of any passing car at almost any other time."

"I imagine it was part of some external fitting," said Gregory, "otherwise it wouldn't be rusty."

Again Wildish agreed. "I think so too," he said. "If we could find a door handle with one rusty screw and one missing, or one rusty and one new one, it would be suggestive enough to trace the movements of the car and its owner on the night of the eleventh. We've got our eye on the car parks, of course, but it's the devil of a job. Think of the thousands of cars in this city, and half of them never enter a car park. Besides, the car we want may have left the city long ago."

Wildish turned the screw backwards and forwards in his hand as though seeking inspiration from it.

"We'll have to find something fairly conclusive to couple with this if it's to be any use to us," he said.

"And you've nothing else to work on?" asked Gregory.

"Not a single damned thing," answered the superintendent. "But I've a mass of literature here for you to read."

From a drawer in his desk he took several typewritten foolscap sheets and gave them to Gregory, who settled himself in a chair and lit his pipe.

The top sheet was a report from Scotland Yard. The name of James Muir was recorded in the Yard's files in connection with the World League of Emancipated Youth. It seemed that Muir, whilst a student in Glasgow, had been closely associated in the League's activities with a young English hot-head named Willett, who had served a short term of imprisonment after a violent affray with the police. Since the League had disbanded, however, Muir had led a blameless life so far as

the Yard was aware; and so, apparently, had Willett, who had found employment with an agricultural machinery concern near Swindon. Nothing was known at the Yard of any of the other characters but, at Gregory's request, urgent cables had been sent to America and South Africa concerning van Arlberg. The replies to the cables showed that van Arlberg was undoubtedly an American mining engineer, and that he had, in fact, left South Africa for Central Europe, where he had acquired an oil-refining interest: the Yard was endeavouring to trace his movements since reaching this country.

The remaining sheets were the result of Wildish's investigations, and showed the movements of the same people on the night of the 11th of June.

Margaret Ferris, it appeared, had on that day returned to her hostel for supper, and had remained there for the rest of the evening in company with a number of other girls. Brancaster and van Arlberg were also satisfactorily accounted for, both having left the city that afternoon. But in the case of the remainder the evidence, which had been difficult to collect tactfully, was inconclusive.

James Muir had returned from the works to his lodgings, where his landlady had given him his supper. She had not heard him go out again, but that did not mean he had not done so. He frequently went out in the evenings, but he was a good tenant and she really took little notice of his movements.

Evan Davies, another bachelor, had also returned for his supper, but had afterwards attended the meeting in St. Cedric's Hall. Davies had walked home from the meeting, and had arrived 'rather late', said his landlady, but she had no idea of the actual time.

No one could vouch for the movements of Walter Danbury and his son Charles after they drove off from the hall in their car. Danbury was a widower, and lived with his son in quite a big house, for which he was at the time unable to get any resident staff; and although one of the two daily woman who looked after his household affairs had stayed to cook supper for the Ogilvys, she had left for her own home long before the Danburys returned from the meeting.

Similarly there was doubt in the case of Dynant and Bembridge, whose wives alone could testify that they went straight home from the meeting.

Gregory laid down the reports and rubbed his chin reflectively.

"There's nothing much here to guide us," he said. "One might build up all sorts of theories, but there's absolutely nothing to support them."

"Nothing whatever," agreed Wildish.

"The only thing that occurs to me," went on Gregory, "is that we have one dark horse in the list, and that's van Arlberg. I know the mysterious bearded stranger is seldom the man one wants, but I think we ought to know a little more about him."

"Judging by the Yard's report he seems genuine enough," said Wildish.

"Oh, I'm sure van Arlberg himself is genuine," Gregory agreed. "But it seems that he's never been in this country before, and so nobody knows him here. I think perhaps we ought to make sure that the man who called on Ogilvy is the real van Arlberg."

"You think it might be a case of impersonation?" asked Wildish with quickened interest.

"I think it might be, but I don't think it is," answered Gregory. "We've not the least reason to suspect him, and judging by the description of the man and his beard I think he's too conspicuous. I'm looking for someone who fits more easily into the landscape. But we don't know as much about van Arlberg as we do about the others. I'd like to know, for example, when and where he landed. And incidentally I'd like to know if he's ever been to Mantringham. May I use your telephone?"

Wildish pushed the instrument across to him, and Gregory set more wheels in motion at Scotland Yard.

CHAPTER XIII

NIGHT ACTION

DURING the next ten days Gregory travelled widely, visiting places as far apart as Glasgow, Swindon, London, the east coast and the Channel Ports.

In the course of his journeys he learned more of van Arlberg. The man had booked from Calais to Dover on the 24th of May; had returned to the Continent by the same route on the 28th; and had finally landed again at Dover on the 3rd of June. Despite his somewhat distinctive appearance, however, none of the Customs or Immigration Authorities could, after such a lapse of time, remember him amongst the thousands of other passengers. It was significant that the 3rd of June was the day following the landing of the stranger on The Flats. A man landing on The Flats on the night of the 2nd could have reached London on the 3rd and there assumed the character of van Arlberg. This, however, was no more than a convenient theory, and Gregory shelved it at the back of his mind with a number of other possibilities which lacked any solid support.

Van Arlberg's offices in Fenchurch Avenue consisted of no more than three rooms recently rented on a short lease, and the temporary staff, Gregory believed, was just what would be needed for a brief stay in England. There was nothing to show whether or not the man had visited Mantringham

Of the other people in whom he was interested, Gregory learned nothing of value; and he returned to the Bath & Bristol dispirited by a complete lack of any concrete facts on which he would work, and oppressed by a sense of urgency, for the sea trials of the Admiralty apparatus were almost due.

In the dining-room of the Feathers he met Dryden, and joined him at his table.

Dryden, who had recently come back from the harbour tests in Plymouth, was jubilant. The litter of packing-cases and pneumatic pipes and electric leads, and the crowd of

overalled fitters which had surrounded his beloved apparatus on board the four destroyers for weeks, had been cleared away at last. On board each ship the gear now stood, its brass and steelwork polished and shining, in its own white enamelled compartments; and it had passed its harbour tests with flying colours.

"It's marvellous," said Dryden with enthusiasm. "The thing has surpassed my wildest hopes, and I cannot see why the trials at sea shouldn't be just as successful."

"I'm so glad," said Gregory. "What are you doing back here, sir?"

"Oh, there's just one small part," answered Dryden, "the thermostatic filament control, that needs slight modification. Actually it's only one of the frills, and we can perfectly well prove the gear without having it fitted at all. However, it'll be nice to have it if it's ready, and James Ogilvy has promised to get it done in time."

"And the sea trials themselves?" asked Gregory. "Is the provisional date confirmed?"

"Yes, they're in three days' time." Then Dryden's face clouded. "How have you been getting on, Inspector? Have you had any success?"

Gregory temporized. "I'm interested in a great many people," he said, "and I've several different theories stored away ready for use when needed."

"But nothing that amounts to evidence?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. But the other side must very soon make another move, and that's when we shall win if we keep our wits keen."

That night Gregory was singularly restless and ill at ease. Dryden had gone out on some business of his own, and when dinner was over Gregory tried for a long while, with complete lack of success, to find solace in a pipe and a book. By ten o'clock he realized he had no recollection at all of the chapters he had been reading, and he laid the book aside. His thoughts kept turning to Mantringham, and in his mind he could see the dark outlines of Ryder's buildings and the forms of the police-constables keeping their patient watch in the shadows. Some cell in his brain kept telling him that he should be there himself, that in Mantringham that night he might have found the key to the riddle.

In desperation he took his hat and went out into the streets, where dusk was falling. Mantringham was far away, but he would do the next best thing. He would go to Mr. Ogilvy's works and try once again to solve the problem of the entry of Ewing's murderer. Had the man broken in, or had he been admitted by Ewing? Very much depended on the answer to that question.

For a while Gregory spoke with the new night watchman, and then returning to the streets he sought inspiration afresh as he studied the dark and silent windows in front and at the back of the building. He learned nothing new. Either method of entry would have been comparatively simple to the right man.

At length he turned back despondently towards the Feathers. He had, he reflected, come upon a foolish errand. He had already exhausted all the existing lines of inquiry, and his hope lay in the very near future. As he had earlier that day said to Dryden, the enemy must make another move before they could bank their winnings, and it was Gregory's job to remain alert and fresh, ready to parry their move and then to strike.

His way home led him past the offices of *Straightforward*, and he glanced up idly at the building. The slow twilight of midsummer still lingered in the north-western sky, and the face of the building was not yet in full darkness. As he looked his nerves tensed, but he did not check his stride. He had seen the movement of a curtain being stealthily drawn in an unlighted window on the first floor.

He walked steadily on for perhaps a hundred yards, then crossed the street and sauntered slowly back on the other side. There was no doubt about it. Both curtains were now drawn in the window where one was being drawn before, and not a chink of light showed through. He noted the position of the window relative to the main entrance, and tried to recall the whereabouts of the lift he had used when he called on Walter Danbury; and he came to the conclusion that it was Danbury's own office window in which the curtains had been drawn.

It was possible, Gregory reflected, that Danbury himself had returned late to his office for some purpose, but would he have troubled to pull the curtains, and so cautiously? It

was more likely that on such a warm June night he would have opened the windows wide: and even had he left them shut and drawn the curtains it seemed improbable that he would do so with such care that not a single gleam of light shone through.

Once more Gregory crossed the street, and this time he walked quietly up the steps to *Straightforward's* door and tried the handle. As he expected, the door was locked.

He stepped back on to the pavement again and surveyed the windows of the ground floor as a means of entry, but quickly abandoned the thought. There were still people about in the street, and the front of the building was no way of entry for an intruder nor for himself either. The *Straightforward* offices were in the middle of an island block of Georgian buildings, and he concluded that there must be an easier way at the back.

He walked swiftly round the block, and on its far side found a quiet street that was not very well lit. Here, in the centre of the block, there was no building but only a high brick wall, and in its centre heavy wooden swinging gates secured with a hasp and padlock. A big brass plate on one of the gates announced the name of *Straightforward*.

Gregory measured the wall with his eye, and then sprang. At the second attempt he grasped its top and with an effort hauled himself up and over, dropping on the far side before he paused to examine his surroundings.

Here was an open courtyard in deep shadow, with the back of the *Straightforward* building looming even more darkly ahead. For a few moments he remained pressed close against the wall, until satisfied that his arrival had neither been seen nor heard, and then he moved stealthily forward until he came to the building itself. The second window which he reached had the bottom sash thrown wide open. For a while he listened intently, and then swung himself on to the sill and followed in the way of the intruder.

Inside the building the darkness seemed intense, and the atmosphere was chill and musty. He could feel that the floor beneath his feet was of stone, and his searching hands touched the slightly rough surface of flaking distemper on the walls of a passage.

He took a small torch from his pocket and flashed it

quickly to right and left. Nearby was a stairway which led both upwards and down, and switching off his torch again he moved slowly towards it until his outstretched hand found the iron banister rail. The treads of the stone stairs were much worn by many years of use, but they gave sure foothold and made no sound under his rubber-soled shoes as he climbed.

The stairway turned back on its tracks, and at the top of the flight Gregory paused. His eyes were getting used to the darkness, and sufficient light now came through a single window to show that he was in another passage and still at the back of the building. He moved from the stairs with his hand on the inner wall to guide him, seeking a way which would lead him through to Walter Danbury's office at the front. He would dearly have liked to use his torch again, but was determined to give no early warning of his approach.

Very soon the wall turned sharply to the right and, following its trend, he stretched out his left arm and touched another cold wall which told him that he had reached a cross passage.

Nothing but blackness ahead—it was odd, he thought, that not a vestige of light showed anywhere. The intruder must be using a light, and even a closed office door would surely release a tell-tale gleam at its foot.

Then, as his questing hand found the baize covering of a heavy swing-door which barred his way, Gregory understood. The front of the building, with his quarry and the light, lay beyond.

He gently pushed the door, and it opened with a shattering squeak which sounded loud as a trumpet note in the silence of the building. For a moment he stopped dead, appalled at the noise. Then he realized that he must act swiftly, for the alarm was now given. He took a quick pace forward, the door swinging to with a squeal of triumph behind him, and then he stood perfectly still, listening.

No sound came to his straining ears, and no light showed. He knew that Walter Danbury's office must be near, but whether it lay on his right hand or his left he could not tell, for he could not remember the swing door from his previous visit, and his recent journey through the back premises in the dark had confused his sense of direction. He knew, however, that if he could only see the lift which had brought

him up before, his memory would guide him unerringly. Once more his torch shone out, and as his quick eye saw the grille of the lift he realized that the door he wanted was within a few paces of him.

He strode swiftly to it, grasped it by the handle, and flung it wide, whilst his free hand sought and found the wall switch that a moment later flooded the room with light.

The room was undoubtedly Walter Danbury's office, and its curtains were closely drawn. But no one was there, nor was there any communicating door to another office.

For a moment Gregory felt baffled. Then he heard a soft movement close at hand, followed by flying footsteps which sped past the open doorway behind him.

He sprang into the passage, close behind his quarry, and the beam of his torch shone out again. He caught a brief glimpse of a dark raincoat, its tails flying, and beneath it grey flannel trousers, as the fugitive swung into the cross passage. As he, too, reached the corner he heard the squeal of the swing door, and a moment later threw out an arm to protect himself as the heavy door swung back on him, shutting off his view and checking his pursuit. With an oath, he savagely flung the door from him again, and plunged on, but vital seconds had been lost. His quarry had turned the bend of the stairs and could be heard, yards ahead, leaping down the last few steps to the ground floor: the man was retreating by the way he had come.

Gregory reached the open window and vaulted into the courtyard, and as he faced the wall on its far side he saw a dark figure haul itself to the top, slide over, and vanish.

This time it was not until the third attempt that Gregory himself managed to get a firm grip of the top of the wall and drag himself up and over. He glanced swiftly up and down the street, and saw that it was empty. He ran to the nearest end of the buildings and scanned the cross-roads, but again no one was in sight. With hope extinguished, he hurried back to the other end of the block, where his fears were confirmed. He had lost his man.

He retraced his steps, and gazed malevolently at the wall. He himself was muscular and fit, but the fugitive who had scaled it so easily undoubtedly had the advantage of him in youth or height or agility, or perhaps a combination of the

three, and his own dislike of the wall was increased by the knowledge that he must climb it yet again.

He returned once more by the open window to Walter Danbury's office, and picking up the telephone asked for police headquarters.

"Is that the sergeant on duty?" he asked, when he was connected. "Inspector Gregory speaking. A man has broken into the *Straightforward* offices. He left five minutes ago by a window at the back. Yes, climbed the wall of the yard and dropped to the street and ran for it. No, I couldn't catch him. Dark raincoat and grey flannel trousers, that's all I can tell you. Now put me through to your superintendent."

Wildish had already gone to bed and answered sleepily at first, but he quickly grasped the situation and told Gregory he would join him as soon as possible.

Gregory replaced the telephone receiver, and going down the main stairway turned the latch of the Yale lock on the front door of the building so as to admit the superintendent when he arrived. Then he returned to the first floor and, sitting in Walter Danbury's chair, methodically filled and lit his pipe before taking stock of the room.

One drawer of the desk was half-open, but there was nowhere any sign of disorder. He pulled the drawer wide, and quickly turned over the papers it contained: there was nothing to show whether or not they had been disturbed. He tried the other drawers. Some yielded at once, and those which were locked responded readily enough to a small skeleton key. Before glancing at their contents he examined the locks critically, and concluded that if they had been opened a key similar to his own must have been used. Satisfied with the desk, he walked across to a combination safe, and wrapping a handkerchief round his hand gently tugged at the handle, to find it firmly closed.

Returning from the safe, his eye fell upon the fire-place behind the desk and in its shadow. A mass of paper ash lay on the otherwise empty hearth, and he stooped and examined it closely. It seemed the intruder had been swift to find what he came to search for, and had been equally swift to destroy it.

Gregory straightened up, and sniffed the atmosphere. Despite the heavy drawn curtains there was none of the smell of burnt paper which he would have expected; but he remem-

bered that the office door had been left open ever since he went in pursuit of the fugitive, and so doubtless the smell had had time to disperse. He stooped once more and stirred the ashes very gently, but they told him nothing, for the papers had been wholly destroyed.

Then he went into the room next door, from which the fugitive had evidently made his escape. This was a small room, and the covered typewriter told him that it was probably the office of Walter Danbury's secretary. Here again there was no disorder, but the curtains drawn across the windows were suggestive enough. Gregory doubted, however, whether the man had been given time to search this room too, and the orderly files in their shelves and the locked filing cabinet in one corner showed no signs of being touched. But why had the man come to this little room if he had already found and burned the object of his search? Or why, if his search was not completed, had he stopped to burn his first find instead of slipping it in his pockets?

Puzzled, Gregory had just returned to Walter Danbury's own office when he heard a footstep in the stone-flagged passage and Superintendent Wildish joined him.

"It's very odd," said Wildish when Gregory had told him all that had happened. "It's difficult to see what a man could hope to find in here. But whatever it was, he must have known pretty well where it was kept, or else had a quick stroke of fortune," and he pointed to the ashes in the hearth.

"Yes, it's very odd indeed," agreed Gregory absently. His brain was seeking a link between the ashes and the interrupted search of the office next door.

Wildish in his turn stooped and examined the ashes carefully.

"It's a pity," he said, "but there's nothing left for us to take away. Our friend's made a good job of it."

"He has," answered Gregory. "I think we can leave it all for the office cleaner."

"Has Danbury been told yet?" asked Wildish.

"No, not yet." Gregory spoke slowly. "I was wondering if we could leave the telling, like the ashes, until the morning."

Wildish looked at him curiously.

"The sooner Danbury tells us what papers have been

destroyed," he said, "the sooner we shall know the motive and hence the man."

"Yes," agreed Gregory, "if Danbury can really tell us. But he may not know, or it may take him some time to find out. Don't you think we could afford a few hours delay?"

"What exactly is in your mind?" asked Wildish.

"So many confused ideas," said Gregory, "that if I spoke of them I'm afraid you'd be just as bewildered as I am. But I'd very much like to break the news myself if you are agreeable. I'd let you know as soon as I'd done so, of course."

"Very well," said Wildish. "But I hope you'll arrange to tell Danbury early, because it may be difficult for me if the news is withheld from him for long."

"I shan't waste time," Gregory assured him.

. . . . . .

The works of Messrs. John Ryder & Company lie beside the main line railway, where four parallel tracks sweep southwards from the city of Mantringham, as straight as the flight of an arrow. From two of these tracks, branch lines converge upon a big white gate, similar to a level-crossing gate, where a single line enters the back of John Ryder's premises. On the far side of the railway runs the Great South Road.

Between the back of the works and the railway fence lies a stretch of waste ground, covered with stunted bushes, and generally holding great piles of scrap awaiting removal. Constable William Fielding had chosen the deep shadow of a hawthorn in which to keep his watch. His choice gave him a clear view of the back of the building and he felt confident that no intruder could reach the windows without being seen. By turning his head he could also see the greater part of the railway fence; but not all of it, for in some places the bushes intervened.

Fielding was a philosophical man, and his tedious watch seemed to be shortened by the reflection that things might have been worse. He might have had this duty in the long, cold nights of winter, when the heavily overcast skies brought real, black darkness, and a man must be far more alert than he need be now. He had instead the short, warm nights of summer, and the early dawns gave relief from the vigil.

Tonight there was no moon to help him, but it was still light enough, for a fitful southerly wind had blown away the smoky fog of the great city, and the stars for once shone clearly.

Whilst Gregory and Wildish were talking together in Walter Danbury's office, Fielding glanced at the luminous hands of his watch, and saw that the time was long past midnight. Then he smiled to himself as a deep and rapidly growing crescendo of sound told him he need not have consulted his watch at all, for the night train to the north was never late on this stretch of line. The express stormed by, its great locomotive followed by the long line of darkened sleeping coaches, and for a moment Fielding turned his head to watch.

As the last coach swung past, he stiffened. Something large and dark had fallen to the line. For a wild moment he wondered if someone had fallen to his death from the rushing train; but reason quickly told him that was an absurd notion. Anyone so falling would have held some of the speed of the train, and would have rolled forwards after striking the metals. The object he had seen had fallen flat, and remained prone.

His nerves began to tingle. A man approaching Ryder's from the Great South Road would have welcomed that train. It would have given him the cover he needed to cross a wide stretch of open ground before flinging himself to the still vibrating rails and worming his way over the last few yards separating him from the boundary fence.

Fielding watched intently; and presently his suspicions seemed confirmed. There was a darker shadow amongst the bushes near the railway, a shadow which moved; and it could not be his fellow-constable on duty at the back, unless he had left his post under the shelter of the southern boundary wall and come into the open to investigate something on his own.

Yes, it was definitely a moving figure, passing silently as a bat from the shelter of one bush to another, and pausing a long while in the shadow of each. Fielding drew his whistle from his pocket in readiness; and then he put it back again. It would be some time yet, he realized, before he could give the alarm, for he must wait until the intruder's line of escape was cut.

For long minutes he lost sight of the dark, flitting figure:

but always it would reappear, and each time it was nearer. It was very odd: the man seemed in no hurry to approach the works buildings: he seemed instead to be working through the bushes towards Fielding's hawthorn tree, as though he was searching for something or someone. It was curious that there was no smudge of white where the man's face should be; he remained just a darker shadow against the darkness of the night.

He was getting quite close, and once more the constable took out his whistle, and prepared to spring; and then suddenly the fellow vanished. He had paused in the shadow of a bush not ten yards away, and his next move should have brought him within reach. He must either have melted back into the shadows whence he had come, or else he had sensed Fielding's presence, in which case he would be waiting, silent and alert, for the constable himself to make the next move.

There was something uncanny about the movements of this sinister stranger, whose tortuous approach might almost suggest that Fielding himself was the object of his visit. Fielding waited tensely, with an unpleasant, prickling sensation in his scalp. He wished uneasily that he had eyes in the back of his head as well as in the front, but sternly suppressed an instinct which kept rising and telling him to give the alarm whilst yet there was time.

Ah! There was the dark figure again. Or was it another? It was farther from him this time, just a momentary glimpse of a shifting shadow, but definitely nearer to the buildings. Gripping his whistle between his teeth in instant readiness, and taking his electric torch in his hand, Fielding left the shadow of his hawthorn and crept silently forward, moving faster than his quarry had moved. He saw him more clearly now, and held him in view for some moments as the man darted across a stretch of open ground to the shelter of a big pile of scrap near the far corner of the buildings.

From the direction of Mantringham came the deep rumble and clanking of an approaching goods train. This would mask the sound of pursuit, and abandoning caution, the constable ran swiftly to the pile of scrap beyond which the intruder had vanished. Then at last he saw his man quite clearly. Beyond the scrap lay another strip of open ground, and in full view was a dark figure working on one of the windows. Fielding

paused: he could go no farther without being seen, and he realized that his best moment would come when the man had forced the window open and thrown one leg over the sill. But the fellow appeared to be having difficulty with the window fastening; he was fumbling badly, as though he was rattled. Then the man turned and looked straight towards him, and Fielding knew that the moment had come when he must act.

With a shrill blast on his whistle he sprang forward, switching his torch in the stranger's eyes to dazzle him. He had a fleeting glimpse of a masked figure, whose right arm swung swiftly up and then down again, before the tear gas bomb burst at his feet and he stumbled and fell, blinded and choking.

Constable Dale, keeping watch under the shadow of the brick wall marking the southern boundary, had seen none of these moves. His watch was upon the wall, and most of the waste land at the back of the works was screened from him by the contour of the ground. But he heard the blast of Fielding's whistle, and now he darted forward. He breasted the rising ground, and saw a dark figure running like a hare through the bushes towards the railway.

Dale headed more to his left, endeavouring to cut off the fugitive, and for a moment it seemed that he would do so. But the man had seen the burly figure of the constable crossing his track, and he had the legs of him. He put on a great burst of speed, and gained a lead. As he ran, his hand felt in the deep pocket of his coat, and he drew out the other tear gas bomb: but he stumbled, and dropped it harmlessly in a patch of tall grass, and he ran on cursing.

At the railway fence Constable Dale was perhaps five yards behind. He saw the man slip nimbly through the wire and dart out on to the permanent way, and he saw the huge bulk of the lumbering goods train from the north very, very close at hand. He followed through the wire, and gave a cry of horror as he saw his man leaping across the rails to the far side of the track, right in the path of the snorting locomotive. With his teeth set, and dread in his heart, Dale sprang madly forward, his arm outstretched in a faint hope of clutching his quarry and dragging him back from fearful mutilation and death. But the man vanished from sight behind the buffers of

the engine, and Dale frantically threw out a rigid left arm to save himself. His hand struck the hot wall of the low-pressure cylinder, and he staggered back and fell clear, sweating and trembling.

The train rumbled on, its driver and fireman all unconscious of the fearful drama which had been played out amongst their wheels: and when it had passed, Dale scrambled to his feet and shakily crossed the line to look for the shattered remains of the fugitive.

He searched the track with his torch, and crossing the north-bound lines also examined the ditch on the far side, but he found no trace of the man he had pursued. And then, as though to mock him, the brilliant headlights of a car sprang into life and disappeared swiftly down the Great South Road.

Constable Dale turned thoughtfully back towards John Ryder's works where he found Fielding, shaken, but again on his feet and on guard.

CHAPTER XIV

NEXT MORNING

THERE was a grim smile on Gregory's face when he joined Dryden at breakfast next morning, and the sailor looked at him critically.

"I think," he said, "that something has happened."

"A great deal has happened," answered Gregory.

He ordered bacon and eggs and coffee, and when the waiter had gone, spoke of the night's activities in the *Straightforward* building, whilst Dryden listened with growing interest.

"What an astonishing thing," he said when Gregory reached the end of his story. "What could a thief hope to find in a place like that?"

Gregory shrugged his shoulders. "It's odd, isn't it? But that's not all. A man tried to break into John Ryder's works in Mantringham last night."

Dryden sat bolt upright. "Good God!" he said. "Then that proves it. There's no doubt now that they've got the secret of Apparatus 'K' from the Bath and Bristol. Did they catch the man at Ryder's?"

"No, I'm afraid not. But he didn't get in."

Dryden swore. "How utterly damnable," he said. "How did the fellow manage to get away?"

Gregory told him the gist of the telephone message he had received early that morning.

"How damnable," Dryden repeated, savagely spearing a piece of bacon. "We shall never catch the fellow now." Then he brightened up. "Well, there's one thing to be thankful for, anyway," he went on. "We do at least know that they haven't got Ryder's specifications yet."

"Even so, I suppose much could be learned at the trials?" asked Gregory.

"Yes, the devil of a lot. We shall have to watch that closer than ever."

For a moment Dryden was silent. Then he said, "I suppose you are going up to Mantringham this morning? Oh no, of course, you can't. You've got this confounded *Straightforward* business on your hands now."

"I haven't got either business on my hands," said Gregory placidly. "Superintendent Wildish has one, and the Mantringham police the other. But I'm not going up to Mantringham. At the moment I'm better placed here."

"I wonder what James Ogilvy will think about it?" mused Dryden.

"Mr. Ogilvy isn't going to know. I don't propose to tell him, or Ryder's either."

"But surely Brancaster ought to know?"

"What good would it do, Commander? The man didn't get in, so why worry the two firms when there's nothing they can do about it? The police guard is still there. Besides," Gregory continued with a smile, "we don't like advertising our failures."

Dryden thoughtfully spread marmalade on his toast.

"I just don't know what to think," he said. "I'm sorry they didn't catch the man, and yet I'm just frightfully relieved to feel sure at last that Ryder's secret is still safe. And then again I'm scared by the proof that they are definitely after it. What do you think yourself, Inspector?"

"As I told you yesterday, the enemy had to make another move soon, and now he's done it."

"Yes, but does that get us any further?"

"It gets us," said Gregory grimly, "a great deal further. I think I'm beginning to understand at last."

Dryden opened his eyes in astonishment. "What do you mean?" he asked. "You don't know who the enemy is?"

"No, I can't quite say that. But I do at least know the lines on which to work."

His breakfast finished, Gregory went round to the *Straightforward* building, and asked for Walter Danbury. As he was shown into the office his quick eye sought the fire-place, and he noted that the office cleaner had done her work well and truly.

Danbury got up with his usual friendly smile. It was plain that he had not yet any knowledge of the previous night's happenings.

"This is the second time I've been honoured by the Yard," he said. "What is it now?"

"I'm afraid, sir," said Gregory, "that I've come to report a burglary here last night."

Danbury's face clouded. "What's that?" he asked sharply. "A burglary? When did that happen?"

"About half past eleven, sir." Gregory gave a brief account of the drawn curtains, his own entry at the back, and his chase of the dark-clad stranger. Then he spoke of the burnt papers in the hearth.

"And there were no signs of disorder? Only the burnt papers." Danbury glanced over his shoulder at the fire-place. "But of course, they'd have been cleared away by Mrs. Ellis this morning," he concluded.

"I expect so, sir. They were quite destroyed, and the ashes were no value to the police."

"Why wasn't I told at once?" asked Danbury curiously. "I believe it is usual."

"Yes, it is, sir, and I must apologize. You see, the man didn't know if he was recognized, nor did he know whether or not it was a police officer chasing him. There's a lot to be said for leaving a thief in doubt for a few hours, especially if by any chance he's an amateur."

"An amateur," repeated Danbury, lighting a cigarette and inhaling deeply. "Why do you mention that?"

"Because it's difficult to see what a professional could hope to get from your offices."

"Yes." Danbury toyed with a pencil that was lying on his desk. "Papers burnt, eh? I wonder——"

"Exactly, sir. If you can tell me what has been destroyed, I may be able to find the man."

"I certainly will tell you, if I can find out. But there's the devil of a lot of papers in a place like this. Unless it's something I've recently been dealing with, I may not be able to help, or not for some time."

Gregory got up to take his leave, but Danbury stopped him.

"Here's a point that occurs to me, Inspector," he said. "The man was disturbed last night. Do you think he might come back another time to finish his search? It might be worth setting a discreet watch on the building."

"That's a very good idea, sir. I'll see the superintendent about it."

Gregory next visited the Bath & Bristol, and asked the gate-keeper if Mr. Ogilvy was in: but on climbing the stairs he went straight to Muir's office.

Muir looked at him coldly, but did not bother to get up from his desk.

"Well?" he asked.

"Yes, thank you," answered Gregory affably, "pretty well. And is everything all right here, too?"

"Why shouldn't it be?" snapped Muir.

"There seem to be so many burglaries happening that I just wondered," said Gregory.

Muir gazed stonily at him, but held his peace.

"And I've been away for a few days," continued Gregory, "and only came back yesterday."

Muir's baleful stare remained unchanged. "I'm sorry," he said acidly.

"Oh, I'm not," said Gregory. "It was a very interesting evening. Only of course it's more satisfactory to take your man on the spot, rather than next day."

"What exactly are you talking about?" asked Muir. "And what is all this about burglaries?"

"Oh, didn't I explain, sir? I'm talking about the *Straightforward* robbery."

"If somebody's broken into the *Straightforward* building," said Muir viciously, "I hope he's got away with the old crook's cash."

"Oh no, sir, there's no cash missing. But a lot of papers have been burnt."

"And I've no doubt there are more that would be better burnt."

"Possibly. I suppose it depends on one's point of view."

"And what is your point of view?"

"The policeman's. In a case like this, a paper is often more valuable to us once it is burnt than it was before."

"No doubt," said Muir sneeringly, "if you ever find out what really was burnt."

"Oh, I shall find out," said Gregory, "in time."

"And why are you telling me all this?"

"Let me see, now, how did we start talking of these details? Well, it doesn't matter. I wanted to satisfy myself that all was well at the Bath and Bristol. And I want to see Mr. Ogilvy. Is he in? Then I won't worry you any longer, sir."

Gregory found a change in Margaret Ferris when he walked into her office. She was obviously tired, and her manner was quiet and subdued, but her eyes were calm with a new sense of purpose. Mr. Ogilvy was not engaged, she told him, and she took him straight into the Director's office.

"Good morning, Inspector," said Mr. Ogilvy, offering a chair. "Please smoke your pipe if you wish. Have you any news for me?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. I've travelled a lot since I last saw you, but I don't know that it's taught me much."

"And I've nothing fresh to tell you," said Mr. Ogilvy gloomily. "At least nothing that would interest you."

"Everything interests me, sir. What's been happening?"

"Everything that shouldn't." It was the first time that Gregory had heard Mr. Ogilvy speak heatedly. "Nothing seems to have gone right in these works since the night I was hit on the head. There's discontent in one of the shops —a thing I've never known before—and Jimmy has got held up with some work for the Commander, and now that damned girl of mine has given notice."

"I'm sorry, sir," said Gregory with sympathy.

"God knows where I'm going to find a new secretary at short notice," continued Mr. Ogilvy. "Not that Miss Ferris has been the slightest use to me lately. There was a time when I thought I'd make something of her, but I cannot make out what's come over the girl. She couldn't have been worse if she'd been in love."

There came a knock on the door.

"Mr. Walter Danbury to see you, sir," said Margaret Ferris quietly. "I've told him you are engaged at the moment."

"Don't bother about me, sir," said Gregory, but making no move to leave the room. "My time is quite free, and Mr. Danbury's business may be urgent."

"Very well then, show him in, Miss Ferris," said Mr. Ogilvy. "Good morning, Walter. As you see, I've got the inspector with me, but I don't suppose you mind, do you?"

Danbury held out his hand to Mr. Ogilvy, and gave the inspector a friendly nod.

"Not a bit," he said. "In fact I've met the inspector already this morning. Has he brought bad news to you as well?"

"No. But what bad news has he given you, Walter?"

"Only that my offices were burgled last night," said Danbury with a smile.

"Good God!" said Mr. Ogilvy explosively. "What the devil is this city coming to? What have you lost, Walter?"

"Nothing very much, so far as I know. Some papers have been burnt. That's why I'm here."

Mr. Ogilvy looked mystified. "I don't understand," he said. "Why are you here? What's it got to do with burnt papers?"

"The inspector wants to know what has been destroyed. I've left my secretary going through her office and mine to find out what's missing."

Only Gregory had noticed the tall figure that had come quietly into the room, but now Muir spoke.

"Excuse me interrupting you," he said to Mr. Ogilvy and ignoring the other two men, "but I thought you'd like to know that the filament controls will be ready for test some time this evening."

"Thank goodness for that," said Mr. Ogilvy. "No, don't go, Jimmy. You've brought the first piece of good news today. Walter's been telling me his offices were burgled last night."

"So I believe," said Muir coldly.

Danbury cocked an eye on him. "News seems to travel fast," he observed.

"Oh, you'd be surprised how it gets around," said Muir.

"It's a bad business," said Mr. Ogilvy moodily. "We all seem to be in trouble."

"Why do you say that, James?" asked Danbury. "What's gone wrong here?"

"Everything. That girl of mine for one thing. It's curious, but it never occurs to one that a girl like that matters until she's going."

Not a muscle of Muir's face had moved, but Gregory had noticed that a new light had come into his eyes: they were very bright, and vitally alert.

"Is Miss Ferris leaving you, sir?" asked Muir in a level voice.

"Next week, Jimmy. She's just told me. Said she couldn't stick it any longer, or some such nonsense."

Danbury murmured his sympathy.

"It's an odd thing, Walter," went on Mr. Ogilvy, "but as I was just telling the inspector, nothing seems to have gone right since I was hit on the head." He stopped abruptly, and a puzzled frown settled on his forehead as he turned to face Gregory. "Do you remember, Inspector, I once told you I was trying to remember something about that ruffian who attacked me in Whitemore Road?"

"I remember, sir," said Gregory quietly. "Has it come back to you?"

"No," said Mr. Ogilvy, "but I'm sure it will. It nearly came back to me the other night. I was walking home late, in the rain, and it was something to do with the lamplight in the puddles." He passed a hand wearily across his head. "And I don't understand that, because it was fine night when I walked home from St. Cedric's Hall."

Gregory was fascinated to see the intense concentration with which Muir on the one hand was gazing at Mr. Ogilvy, and Walter Danbury on the other was gazing at Muir. But it was to Mr. Ogilvy that the inspector spoke.

"I shouldn't worry about it, sir," he said lightly. "As you didn't actually see the man, I doubt if it can be important."

"Perhaps not," said Mr. Ogilvy, shaking his head. "But I wish I could remember, all the same."

"James," said Walter Danbury, "enough of troubles. You'll suddenly remember it one day when you aren't thinking about it at all. Come and have some dinner with me this evening, and we'll drown our mutual sorrows. Could Janet come too?"

"What time will the filament controls be ready for test Jimmy?" asked Mr. Ogilvy.

"I couldn't be sure," answered Muir. "Perhaps about eight o'clock, perhaps not until nine."

"Then it's no good, Walter," said Mr. Ogilvy. "I've promised this apparatus to the Commander, and Jimmy and I must see the tests."

"In that case you must have a night-cap with me on your way home, James."

"Thank you, Walter, I'll do that with pleasure. That is, provided I'm not too late, of course."

"Good, then that's settled," said Danbury. "And you won't be late, because I know enough about your firm to know that your tests don't go wrong." He picked up his hat and moved towards the door.

"I'll come with you, sir, if I may," said Gregory. "I've finished my business here, that is, unless Mr. Ogilvy wants me for anything else," and he looked round inquiringly.

Mr. Ogilvy shook his head.

"No," he said, "but I'm glad to see you at any time, Inspector."

CHAPTER XV

A RECONCILIATION

As soon as the door closed behind the two men, Muir spoke.

"I've settled the trouble in Evan Davies's shop," he said.

Mr. Ogilvy's eyes lit up. "You have, Jimmy? Good lad. What was it all about?"

"A stupid little thing," said Muir with a dry smile. "Something to do with the tea urn in the canteen. Anyway, it's all settled now."

Mr. Ogilvy gazed thoughtfully at the younger man.

"Jimmy," he said, "I don't quite know where this firm would be without you. I suppose you can't find me a secretary?"

"I don't know," said Muir. "What have you done about it so far?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Ogilvy.

"I think that's the best thing you could do, at any rate until tomorrow. Look, sir, why don't you go round to your club and read the papers? There's nothing to keep you here this morning, and it would do you good to get out of the atmosphere of the works."

"I believe you're right, Jimmy. I feel thoroughly unsettled."

"I'm sure I'm right," said Muir.

For a long while Mr. Ogilvy hesitated, staring moodily out of the window. It was quite unprecedented that the Managing Director of the Bath & Bristol should spend the morning at his club. But circumstances were unusual, and perhaps on this occasion it was justified.

"Very well, Jimmy," said Mr. Ogilvy. "You can have the works to yourself until this afternoon. You'll know where to find me if you want me."

Muir went with Mr. Ogilvy as far as the head of the stairs,

and then, turning back, opened the door of Miss Ferris's office and walked in.

Margaret Ferris looked up from her typewriter, and then got politely to her feet.

"Sit down, please," said Muir quietly, leaning against the mantelpiece. "I hear you are leaving."

"Yes," answered Margaret.

"Do you mind telling me why?"

"Not in the least. But I think you know already."

"I can think of two or three reasons," said Muir, "and they can't all be right."

The girl made no effort to help him, and he continued.

"Is it because of all the trouble and suspicion there's been in the works?"

"That has something to do with it." Her voice was very quiet.

"But you were unhappy before." This time it was a statement, not a question, and Margaret made no answer.

"Have you any other job in mind?" he asked.

"No," she said. "At least nothing definite. But I shall get another job easily enough. I suppose Mr. Ogilvy will give me some sort of reference."

"I should think so," said Muir. "Would you look for another job hereabouts?"

The girl shuddered, and a look of pain came into her eyes.

"No," she said in a small voice.

For a moment Muir hesitated, and then he quietly crossed the room and very gently laid his hand on the girl's shoulder. She made no move, but stared dumbly down at her typewriter.

"Margaret," said Muir haltingly, "would you tell me something?"

The girl nodded her head slowly. She felt she could not speak.

"Does Charles Danbury mean anything to you? Or his father?"

She shook her head, and very gently he turned her face towards his, and he saw that her eyes were filled with tears. Then she was in his arms, sobbing unrestrainedly on his shoulder.

For a long while Muir was silent, clumsily stroking the girl's hair.

"Margaret dear," he said at last, "I've done you a great wrong. I wanted to bring you happiness, and so far I've brought you nothing but grief."

She shook her head again, and then once more raised her face to his. He saw that her tear-filled eyes were now smiling.

"No, Jimmy darling," she said, "it's my own fault. I've been a silly little fool. I wanted to be so proud of you. Oh, it all seems so stupid now. I wanted to see you wearing smart clothes; as if that matters. And you always seemed so wrapped up in your work. I thought, perhaps, if you saw me going about with Charles——" She hesitated, and stopped.

"That it would shake me up a bit?" asked Muir gently. "I suppose it ought to have done, but I saw it differently. You'll have to take me in hand."

Margaret's face had grown troubled again.

"And then, Jimmy, there's been all this dreadful suspicion, and I thought you didn't trust me. Jimmy, what's going on here? It's all been so horrible since—since——" Her voice died away.

Muir's own face had hardened, and his unseeing eyes which looked straight above her head at the blank wall were grim.

"Don't think about it any more, dear," he said in a toneless voice. "And don't worry any more about the safe keys. They've nothing to do with it. We've all been through a bad storm, but the sun's going to come out now."

He stooped and kissed her lightly on the forehead.

"And now I'm going out myself," he said.

"Jimmy darling, where are you going?" she cried, clinging to his arm.

"I'm going to get my hair cut," he said laughingly. "But I shan't be long, and I'll be back in plenty of time to take you out to lunch."

Once more he kissed her, this time on the lips, and then he made for the door.

. . . . . .

Inspector Gregory, meanwhile, was sitting alone in the bar of the Feathers, placidly waiting upon events. He was,

in fact, filling in the half-hour before lunch-time with a tankard of beer. To him came the hall porter.

"Inspector Gregory, sir? You're wanted on the telephone."

Gregory closed the door of the call-box in the hall and took up the receiver.

"Hallo," he said. "Inspector Gregory speaking."

"It's Walter Danbury here," said a voice in the receiver. "You remember those papers I showed you the other day? About the League? Well, they've gone."

"Thank you, sir," said Gregory. "You don't surprise me in the least. Is anything else missing?"

"Not so far as I know. But I'm still searching, and I'll tell you any other developments."

"Yes, please do, sir. You didn't see it, of course, but there was a lot of ash."

CHAPTER XVI

A GLEAM OF LIGHT

"NOT ready yet I'm afraid, Commander," said Mr. Ogilvy, looking up from his desk as Dryden strode into the office that evening. "We didn't expect you so soon."

"I thought I'd better come early in case you were ahead of time," said Dryden.

Mr. Ogilvy shook his head.

"Eight o'clock was the earliest that Jimmy hoped for," he said. "But have no fear. Jimmy doesn't make mistakes, and your filament controls won't let you down. I suppose you'll be taking them straight to Plymouth tomorrow?"

"No, I've got to give our final figures to the Admiralty first. I'll probably travel down from Paddington tomorrow night. It's amazing to think that we're within thirty-six hours of the trials, isn't it? You and I have put a lot of work into the gear during the last few months."

"You have, Commander," corrected Mr. Ogilvy. "I've only played a small part. I don't know just what your gear is, but I'm an intelligent man, and I know from the principles employed that it's very important. May God be thanked that the rest of your apparatus at Ryder's Works, has been kept secure. You've no doubt of that, I suppose?"

"None at all. But we're going to take very special precautions at the trials."

"Then you still think that somebody is interested in the gear," said Mr. Ogilvy decidedly.

Dryden shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know what to think," he said, "except for one thing. I wish we'd caught Ewing's murderer."

Mr. Ogilvy noticed that Muir had come quietly into the room, and he marvelled at the change in the man. He was well groomed, and his hair was short and neatly-brushed. But there were signs of strain in his face.

"I'm afraid it'll be at least another two hours," said Muir. "Say nine o'clock, or soon after."

"Never mind, Jimmy," said Mr. Ogilvy kindly. "We're in no hurry. I suppose you've got the works canteen open?"

"Yes," said Muir.

"Then I'll get some supper sent up for the Commander and myself."

Muir nodded, and went out.

"I'm sorry, Commander," went on Mr. Ogilvy, "but that's the best I can do. There wouldn't be time to go to my club."

He pressed a button on his desk, and a bell sounded in the secretary's office.

Mr. Ogilvy was not in the habit of noticing his secretary's appearance to any great degree, and it was probably the change in Muir which now drew his attention to the girl: but Muir had looked care-worn and worried. He gazed at Margaret in astonishment. This girl, who in recent weeks had been by turn forgetful, careless, satisfactory and almost hysterical, was now cool and serene and—his brain strove for a word—yes, in some indefinable way radiant. With difficulty he recalled his mind to the business on hand.

"Miss Ferris," he said, "you won't be needed for the next two hours, so you had better go and get some supper. But please be back at nine o'clock. I shall want you to take notes."

Dryden found that the time of waiting passed pleasantly enough, for Mr. Ogilvy was an interesting talker with a dry sense of humour.

In due course Muir returned to announce that he was ready, and together they watched with close attention at the testing-board while the four sets of filament controls were subjected to minute changes of temperature and current. There followed a final check of figures and calculations in Mr. Ogilvy's office, and then he turned to Dryden.

"Are you satisfied, Commander?" he asked.

"Couldn't be better pleased," said Dryden cheerfully. He was busy packing the delicate apparatus in a large attache case.

"Then that'll be all, Jimmy. I'm sorry I've kept you so late, Miss Ferris, but please don't trouble to type out those notes until the morning."

Mr. Ogilvy glanced at his watch. It was barely ten o'clock.

"I'd like to offer you a whisky-and-soda, Commander," he said, "but I'm afraid there's nothing here. I'm stopping for a night-cap with Walter Danbury on my way home. I'm afraid it's off your route, but would you care to come with me? I forget whether you've met Walter, but he's a good fellow and will be delighted to see you."

"I'd like to come very much," said Dryden.

Mr. Ogilvy locked up his desk and, saying good night to Muir and Miss Ferris, he and Dryden set out on foot for Walter Danbury's house in the cool of the early dusk.

As soon as the door closed behind them, Muir faced Miss Ferris with a look of decision.

"It's no good, Margaret," he said. "I can't stand the strain any longer. I must get this business settled once and for all."

The girl looked at him with troubled eyes.

"But how, Jimmy darling?" she asked. "What can you do?"

"Something drastic," he answered. "It's asking for trouble to wait any longer."

She walked up to him, and rather timidly laid a hand on his arm.

"I wish I could help you, Jimmy," she said softly. "Won't you trust me and tell me what it's all about?"

"You don't have to know," he answered, almost roughly. "At least, not yet."

She turned away and, crossing to her desk, picked up a little morocco case he had given her and lit a cigarette. Outwardly she was now the more calm of the two. But her heart was full of pain. She was wishing most desperately that the love between them could have ripened sooner. Of Jimmy's love she now had no doubt. And yet something stood between them, some dark and sinister shadow that she could not understand. And she knew that her hold on him was not yet strong enough to curb his more impetuous and violent nature.

She turned again and caught his eye, and held it firmly.

"Jimmy," she said gently, "you spoke of getting the business settled. Just what do you propose to do?"

"I'm going to follow him," said Muir.

"Who, Jimmy?"

"Why, Ogilvy of course. I ought to have started already."

"Jimmy, darling," she asked with a catch in her voice, "must you?" The fear of the unknown was gripping her, bringing a warning of utter and irrevocable disaster. "If there's danger in it, there'll be danger for you too, Jimmy. And you must think of me. We've—we've only just found each other."

"There's worse danger in doing nothing," said Muir bluntly.

"But he's got Commander Dryden with him," she pleaded.

"I don't care whether Dryden's with him or not," said Muir, "I'm going. They won't be together when they go home."

Margaret saw that she was losing her battle, and changed her tactics.

"Well, just as you like," she said with a shrug of her shoulders.

Her tone was now light, but when she turned and strolled casually back to her desk it was so that he should not see the hurt in her eyes.

"You might remember one thing, though, Jimmy," she went on. "We don't want any more tragedies, and certainly not an unnecessary one."

"We don't want the tragedy that I'm thinking about," said Muir violently.

He strode over to her, and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"You must keep out of this, Margaret," he said in a hard voice. "It's nothing to do with you. I know you hate this place now, and I'll take you right away, and we'll start afresh. It can't be long, just a day or two."

So she had lost, and her man was going out into the unknown danger that lay in the darkening streets, perhaps to meet disaster, perhaps death. She felt sick with fear, she who on this night of all nights should have been so radiantly happy. For a while she stood with her head bowed, numbed with the horror of it all.

Then a new light came to her. Jimmy was her man. And if he was going out to meet danger, surely he needed all the strength and the support that she could give him.

She turned and faced him squarely. Her grey eyes were calm and steady again, and she held out her arms to him.

"You know best, Jimmy darling," she said quietly. "Take care of yourself, and God bless you."

He stooped and kissed her gently on the forehead.

"Good night, dearest," he said. "You've finished in here now, haven't you?"

"Yes," she answered lightly. "I shall now go home to bed like a good little girl."

Muir picked up his hat and strode out of the works, leaving her staring with misty eyes at the doorway through which he had passed. Quite mechanically, she covered her typewriter and tidied the papers lying on her desk. Then she followed him out into the street: but the road which she took did not lead to her hostel.

. . . . . .

It was nearly dark by the time Mr. Ogilvy and John Dryden walked up the drive to Danbury's house, and neither of them saw the figure crouched in the shadows near the porch.

Walter Danbury himself opened the door to them and led the way into the brightly-lit hall whilst Mr. Ogilvy introduced his companion.

"I'm glad to meet you, Commander," said Danbury. "You and James have had a long day. I hope the tests of your apparatus were successful?"

"Very," said Dryden. "No troubles at all. It was only a very small part of the apparatus, you know."

He was looking for somewhere to leave his attache case, and his eyes fell on an oak chest beyond the umbrella stand. He moved towards it, and as he did so his foot struck the stand so that there was a great clatter of walking-sticks and umbrellas.

Mr. Ogilvy stopped dead in his tracks.

"Good God!" he said, gazing at the umbrella-stand as though hypnotized. "So that's what it was."

He looked up, and saw his host staring at him.

"That's what what was?" asked Danbury inelegantly.

Mr. Ogilvy's mouth opened as though to speak, and then instead he waved vaguely at the light overhead.

Danbury followed the line of his glance, and shook his head.

"What's the matter, James?" he asked.

"The—the light," stammered Mr. Ogilvy. "And the sticks."

Dryden had turned, and was looking at Mr. Ogilvy in astonishment.

"I'm sorry about the sticks," he said. "I'm afraid I caught my foot in the rack. They made an awful clatter."

"No, no, Commander, it's not the clatter. The sticks all moved, and there was a glint of light from overhead——"

Mr. Ogilvy had moved forward, and was gingerly fingering the sticks. Two or three of them, and one of the umbrellas, had silver bands near their handles. Mr. Ogilvy lifted one of them, a light malacca cane, and for a moment it caught the light from the ceiling lamp and reflected it. He dropped it as though he was scalded, and looked up again at Danbury.

"Walter——" he began. Then he stopped. His jaw was dropped, so that he reminded Dryden of an elderly codfish.

"James," said Danbury very quietly, "what is the matter with you? What have you seen?"

Mr. Ogilvy gulped. Then he passed a hand across his forehead.

"I'm sorry, Walter," he said weakly. "For a moment I felt quite queer. It must be the heat, I suppose." He seemed to be making a great effort to control himself. "I saw the light glint on the band of the stick, and that's what I saw when I was hit on the head. There was moonlight, you know. I saw it glint on something above me."

"You mean you saw the stick the fellow used ?"

"No. Just the glint of it. I suppose it had a silver band on it too."

"I see," said Danbury reflectively. "You mean you wouldn't recognize the stick if you saw it again?"

"Oh no, Walter. I only saw the glint. But that's what I've been trying to remember all this time."

"What a pity," said Danbury. "I thought you were going to tell us something more conclusive. Well, come on, James," taking him by the arm, "I'm going to give you a good stiff drink."

Danbury led the way to his study at the back of the house. It was a small room, comfortably furnished, and

the light from it streamed through the open window into the garden. Charles was there, and as the others came in he got up to his feet and switched off the wireless.

"Nothing worth listening to?" asked his father, busying himself with whisky decanter and syphon. "I suppose you haven't heard the news tonight, Commander?"

"No," answered Dryden. "I'm afraid we were too busy to think of it."

"It was worth listening to," said Walter Danbury. "Amazing happenings in the Test."

"How are we getting on?" asked Dryden with interest.

"They had a shower of rain at lunch-time," said Danbury. "Just enough to make the wicket sticky. Suited our slow bowlers down to the ground. Australian wickets falling like ninepins in the afternoon."

"Oh, grand. Then we may get a finish to this match."

"It looked like that at first. But then Rattery pulled a muscle and had to be taken off."

"Wonderful," said Mr. Ogilvy. "Wonderful."

Danbury looked round with a comical smile. "Wonderful for the Australians, James," he said.

"But I thought——" Mr. Ogilvy was covered in confusion. "Didn't you say we were doing rather well?"

"Yes, but I said that earlier." Walter Danbury carried a strong whisky-and-soda over to him. "Sink that, James," he said. "You'll feel better. Draw the curtains, will you, Charles —no, you can leave the window open."

The whisky was passed and conversation became general, but it was plain to Dryden that something was very wrong with Mr. Ogilvy. His talk was inconsequent and disjointed, and his mind appeared to be eternally wandering far afield. Of course he was getting old, reflected Dryden, and had just finished a long and rather trying day in his office: and it seemed from a few remarks he had made during supper that things had recently been going badly in the works. But there must, he felt, be some deeper reason for the man's loss of grip, and it could not be the trivial episode of the walking-sticks, even if it had reminded him of a bad moment. On the whole he was not at all surprised that Mr. Ogilvy quickly finished his whisky-and-soda and soon gave him the signal to leave.

"It's not late, James," protested Danbury, "and you're not looking at all fit yet. Don't you think another drink would do you good?"

Mr. Ogilvy shook his head. "No, thank you, Walter," he said. "I must be getting home."

"What about you, Commander? You needn't go yet, need you?"

"I think I'll walk with Ogilvy," said Dryden. "I dare say he'd like company."

"Oh, that's all right. Charles will run him home in the car."

Dryden hesitated. "Well, in that case——" he began.

"Let's both stay," said Mr. Ogilvy surprisingly. "Walter's right. I need another drink."

"That's more like you, James," said Danbury in a friendly tone, taking his glass to refill it.

Dryden long remembered this as one of the most difficult hours he had ever experienced. Walter Danbury was a good host, and Charles also did his best: but James Ogilvy seemed completely to have gone to pieces and the whisky showed no signs of improving matters. He was glad when once again he was given the signal to leave.

"Well, James," said Danbury, looking at him critically, "it's been nice to see you, but I think you want a good night's rest. Get the car out, will you, Charles?"

Mr. Ogilvy held up a protesting hand.

"No thank you, Walter. I'd rather walk. It'll do me good."

"Then Charles shall walk with you. You aren't fit enough to go on your own, James."

Dryden caught Mr. Ogilvy's eye, and in it read a clear message. For some inscrutable reason Mr. Ogilvy particularly wanted his company.

"I'll walk with you," said Dryden. "It'll do me good too. My head's still full of figures, and I need a lot of fresh air."

Danbury gave him an approving look.

"The good Samaritan," he said. "It's right out of your way. But just as you like."

As Walter Danbury led the way to the front door he turned to Charles. "Will you go out the back way and shut the garage?" he said.

Danbury switched on the light in the outside porch and said good night on the steps, and then Mr. Ogilvy and Dryden

set off briskly down the gravelled drive. Dryden, looking back, saw their host wave to them before a bend in the drive hid the porch from view.

As they passed out through the gate into the road, a dark figure moved towards them from the shadow of the overhanging rhododendrons, and Mr. Ogilvy shied violently. Then, as he recognized a well-known voice, he recovered himself.

"Why, Jimmy lad," he said, clutching him by the arm. "God be praised that it's you."

CHAPTER XVII

SURPRISE

CATCHING hold of Dryden with his other hand, Mr. Ogilvy hurried away from the gate. As they went, Dryden fancied that he heard a rustle in the bushes of the garden they had left.

"Jimmy," said Mr. Ogilvy in a low voice, "how did you come to be there?"

"I walked," said Muir, "just as the other man did. At least I suppose he walked too."

For a hundred yards they hurried on in silence, and then Mr. Ogilvy stopped dead.

"What other man, Jimmy?" he demanded.

"I don't know," said Muir. "He was just there. I went round to the back, where the lighted window was. But he'd got there first. I saw him move, close under the sill."

"Oh, we must be quick," said Mr. Ogilvy, setting off again briskly. "Your inspector friend, Commander, he's still there? He hasn't gone?"

"You mean Gregory? I was talking to him at lunch-time, and he didn't say anything about leaving. Why, do you want to see him?"

"Yes, of course I do."

"But this isn't the way to the Feathers," protested Dryden.

"Yes it is," snapped Mr. Ogilvy.

Glancing behind him, he swiftly crossed the road and turned into another which ran at right angles. This, like the one they had just left, was broad and dark, and flanked by the gardens and houses of the more prosperous people of the city. To Dryden it seemed vaguely fraught with menace.

Something had happened in that house to upset Mr. Ogilvy very much, and Dryden knew when he was in the presence of fear. And what had Muir been doing lurking in the shadows?

As though sensing the younger man's thoughts, Mr. Ogilvy spoke again.

"Commander," he said, breaking into a run, "I am very frightened."

"Well, there are three of us here," said Dryden cheerfully. "We ought to be able to give a good account of ourselves. Just what are you afraid of?"

For a moment Mr. Ogilvy was silent. Then he said: "I fear for your blue prints, Commander. Walter has them."

To Dryden this statement came as such a jolt that he felt as though he had been struck on the jaw. The darkness, meanwhile, hid the grim smile which settled on Muir's tightly pressed lips.

Mr. Ogilvy's breath began to labour as he ran.

"If anything happens, Commander," he panted, "to me, I mean, you must tell the inspector. I've no proof. But Walter has them."

Suddenly Mr. Ogilvy whipped round, and dragged his companions into a gateway. For all the turmoil of his thoughts, Dryden's senses were now acutely alert, and he too had heard the car approaching from behind. It was running on side-lights only.

The car slowed as it reached them.

"Taxi, Mister?" asked a gruff voice.

"No thank you," said Mr. Ogilvy, and then: "We are just going in here," he lied.

"I should take it easy, Mister," said the voice, as the driver let in the clutch again. "Coppers wouldn't like to see you running like that."

As the car passed, Dryden gazed at the dark shape of it. He saw that it was a big saloon and he fancied, but could not be sure, that a figure was crouching in the back of it.

When the car had passed out of sight Mr. Ogilvy set off again, but now at a brisk walk, for he could run no more. The dark residential roads seemed to stretch away endlessly before them, and the three men hurried on in silence each occupied with his own thoughts, and each instinctively conserving his energies for what might come. Dryden's brain was racing. What did Ogilvy mean, that Danbury had the blue prints? Had Danbury then been concerned in the murder of the night-watchman at the Bath & Bristol? And what

were the implications of this shattering thought? What action must now be taken? Dryden shelved this last question as being for the moment insoluble. The immediate business was to get out of these dark and empty roads where danger was evidently lurking.

At length they turned left into a silent street of shops. The pavements were deserted, but here there was street lighting and, although it was sparse and left great pools of shadow, it gave a sense of companionship and safety, and their pace slackened. Soon they would reach the brighter lights of the city: and soon there would be other people in the streets, not many of course at that time of night, but still some. They must have been fully half an hour on their way already, and nothing had happened. Another five minutes, or ten at the outside, should see them in Central Square.

Mr. Ogilvy stepped into the roadway and strode confidently across to the far side, but as they reached the pavement Muir set a vice-like grip on his wrist and stopped.

Perhaps a hundred yards ahead another road crossed theirs and near the corner, in one of the pools of shadow but showing up against the light beyond, a group of men was standing. There seemed to be four, and another was slouching across the road towards them, a big, heavily-built fellow. Someone pointed, and there seemed to be a brief discussion, and then the group began to move slowly towards Mr. Ogilvy and his two companions.

"Leave this to me," said Muir quickly. "I know the way."

He darted into a narrow alley between an ironmonger's and a window full of house furnishings, and as he did so three of the newcomers broke into a lumbering run, whilst the other two turned back on their tracks. Dragging the breathless Mr. Ogilvy between them, Muir and Dryden sprinted down the alley, and reached a stretch of waste ground where lorries were accustomed to unload big and heavy stores at the back of the shops. Muir swung right-handed, dodged behind a baker's delivery van parked out for the night, crossed an open stretch where there was no cover, and dived into another alley even darker and narrower than the first.

And now, as they ran, Dryden could hear swift footsteps behind them. He turned his head, but could see nothing. He fancied that the footsteps were gaining, and his every

instinct was to turn and face the pursuers. He knew, however, that he was only on the fringe of all these mysteries, and that he must do as his two companions thought best. In any event, matters would soon be solved one way or another, for the pace was too hot to last. He himself was young and active, but even he, as he ran, felt the blood throbbing in his temples, and he knew that Mr. Ogilvy must be near the end of his tether.

The alley swung sharply away towards the left, masking the sound of the following steps. Dryden was on Mr. Ogilvy's right, and he never noticed the other alleyway which opened on to theirs on the far side until suddenly there was a wild flurry and a scuffle. A heavy stick whistled through the air, and someone's hat went spinning into his face. He heard a blow struck, and a groan. He dropped Mr. Ogilvy's arm and sprang behind him, and with his free hand struck out at a vague but burly figure looming close. His fist met bone, and someone went down with a thud, and a second man tripped and sprawled across his comrade. Then he heard a hoarse and urgent call from Muir, farther down the alley, and sprinted after him. He had barely caught up when bedlam was loosed behind him. He heard shouts and more blows, and furious cursing, and he smiled grimly to himself as he realized that the pursuers, stumbling over the fallen man in the darkness, had mistaken friend for foe, and that the enemy were fighting it out amongst themselves.

The alley swung back to the right, silencing the sound of the battle, and then to the right again; and suddenly they came out into a broad, open square, brightly lit, and Dryden saw his hotel facing him on the far side. He saw, too, on the pavement near him, the stolid figure of a police-constable.

Dryden disengaged his arm from Mr. Ogilvy's and stepped swiftly to the constable.

"Officer," he said urgently, "would you mind escorting us across the road? My friend has had an accident, and I am afraid of the traffic."

There was no traffic in sight, and the constable looked at him curiously. Then he turned his gaze on the dishevelled, speechless figure of Mr. Ogilvy and on Muir, both of whom had halted on the curb beside him. As Dryden followed his glance, he realized with a shock that he had spoken no more

than the truth, for Muir, hatless, was dabbing with his handkerchief at his forehead, where blood was flowing down over his eye.

"Good evening, Mr. Ogilvy," said the constable. "Good evening, Mr. Muir. You seem to have been in trouble." His tone was reproving, but his action was swift as he took Muir's arm and, with Dryden returning to Mr. Ogilvy's side, the four men stepped out across the road.

"Now sir," said the constable gravely, as they stopped on the pavement outside the Feathers, "would you care to tell me anything about the accident you mentioned?"

"I'd rather not, Officer, if you don't mind," said Dryden. "As a matter of fact we're going in here to see Inspector Gregory of Scotland Yard about it. But thank you for your escort. I think my friends needed it."

"I'm glad to have helped you, sir. Good night," said the constable as they passed through the revolving doors into the hotel.

The lounge of the Feathers was empty, and after a quick glance into the smoking-room Dryden led his companions to the lift, and in a few moments was knocking on the door of Gregory's room.

"Come in," said a familiar and friendly voice.

Gregory was leaning against the mantelpiece, and seated in the only arm-chair which the room possessed was Margaret Ferris. The girl sprang up with a cry of alarm when she saw the blood on Muir's face, and she ran swiftly to him.

"Yes?" said Gregory calmly. "Who's going to speak first?"

"I think I'd better," answered Dryden, putting his precious attache case down on the floor. "I can't give you much detail, but I think I've more breath left than the others. Something went wrong in Danbury's house, and Ogilvy says that Danbury has the blue prints from the Bath and Bristol. Outside the house we found Muir, and we've been running, because Ogilvy said time was precious. Just before we got here we had a bit of trouble with a gang of thugs. I'm afraid I've no clear notion what it's all about."

"I see," said Gregory in a non-committal tone. His glance wandered to the others. Mr. Ogilvy, his breath still coming in great gasps, was sitting limply in a chair mopping his brow.

Margaret, using her own handkerchief now, was tenderly bathing Muir's forehead from the cold tap in the wash basin.

There was silence in the room except for the panting of the elderly man in the chair and the soft murmurings from the wash basin. Dryden felt perplexed and irritated. The inspector seemed possessed of a truly oriental patience. The minutes were slipping by, precious minutes in which Danbury, forewarned, might be making his escape. And the inspector was doing nothing.

At length he could stand it no longer. "Oughtn't we to do something about it?" he asked. "About Danbury, I mean?"

Gregory held up a hand for silence, and Dryden noticed that his eyes were hard: but he was not yet to be diverted, and tried again.

"I don't know what you think we're telling you, Inspector," he said quietly, "but I can assure you there was no imagination about the scrap in the alleyway."

"I'm sure there wasn't, sir," said Gregory. It seemed to Dryden that the inspector's voice had lost its friendliness: but perhaps he had asked for it.

"I'm sorry," he said in a conciliatory tone. "That must have sounded as though I was trying to teach you your business."

Margaret had finished cleaning Muir's injury, and had bandaged it with a large clean handkerchief of Gregory's which she found lying on the dressing-table. Now, she gently pushed him down into the arm-chair in which she had been sitting, and took up a position behind it, with her left hand resting lightly on his shoulder. She looked, thought Dryden, like a watchdog on guard.

Mr. Ogilvy raised his head wearily.

"The Commander's right," he said. "It's Walter Danbury: my own friend."

"I see," said Gregory.

For a while Mr. Ogilvy appeared to be marshalling his thoughts.

"I'd been trying to remember about my accident," he went on, "and tonight it came back to me in Danbury's house. The Commander kicked the umbrella-stand and the sticks rattled. And the light glinted on the silver band of one of them. That's what I saw, above my head, the night I was

attacked and robbed; the moonlight glinting on the silver band of a stick. At least, that's what it looked like," he concluded rather lamely.

Gregory received this news in silence, and Dryden became aware of an atmosphere of strain creeping into the room.

Mr. Ogilvy sat upright, and squared his shoulders.

"That may sound a trivial thing," he said more firmly. "But when I told Walter Danbury, I caught his eye. He thought I'd recognized the actual stick. Inspector, there was murder in his eye."

Again there was dead silence, and Dryden with difficulty suppressed a shiver. There was definitely a chill in the room now, and a sense of uncertainty and foreboding. Some kink of memory took him back to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland in the month of May, when the blinding, writhing fogs, chill as the grave, come down with icebergs from the north. He looked round at his companions. Mr. Ogilvy was obviously aware of it, and Muir had sensed it too. Muir, his lips set in a tight line, was leaning forward in his chair, staring at the inspector with a look of fixed intensity. Only Margaret, despite her woman's intuition, seemed blissfully unaware of the change that had come over the little group as she tenderly smoothed down the collar of Muir's jacket.

"Inspector," said Mr. Ogilvy, and now there was a sharp ring in his voice, "you are deliberately ignoring what I say." He made a move to get up from his chair.

But Gregory was quicker. His hand seemed to move with the speed of light, and in a fraction of a second Mr. Ogilvy found himself facing a revolver: the hand which held it was as steady as a rock, and the eye behind it was cold and quite uncompromising.

Mr. Ogilvy sank back limply in his chair, his mouth wide open, and all the colour draining from his face.

"Search him, Commander," said Gregory laconically.

Dryden felt stunned, and his movements were automatic as he strode up to Mr. Ogilvy and swiftly ran his hands over his pockets for a weapon.

"Nothing," he reported.

"Just as well," said Gregory. "Now, James Ogilvy, place your hands on your knees and don't move them."

Mr. Ogilvy obeyed, and the muzzle of the revolver was

lowered. Dryden now stood at Gregory's side, so that he faced the other three, and their expressions were indelibly printed on his shocked mind: Mr. Ogilvy, deathly white, jaw still dropped, looking very, very old: Muir, his outward calm shattered at last, his eyes flickering between the inspector and Mr. Ogilvy, eyes which—was it fear that those eyes held?—Dryden rather thought it was; and Margaret Ferris standing rigid and wide-eyed behind Muir, her hand still raised to her mouth to check the scream she had successfully fought down.

This time the oppressive silence was brief, but to Dryden it seemed to go on for ever and ever whilst Gregory, his face inscrutable, rocked slowly backwards and forwards on his heels.

It was Mr. Ogilvy who spoke.

"Inspector——" he began, but Gregory cut him short.

"I advise you to reserve your defence," snapped Gregory. "Commander," he added, "tell me if that man moves," and still holding the revolver he walked over to the telephone and gave a number to the girl at the desk below. He was quickly connected.

"Police Headquarters? Yes, Sergeant, Inspector Gregory speaking. Is your superintendent there? No? Then listen carefully and do exactly as I say—you can tell the Superintendent afterwards. Have you got two cars available? Right, then send one of them to the Feathers and take Mr. James Ogilvy of the Bath and Bristol into custody. I've got him here in my room, Number 18a. And send the other to Mr. Ogilvy's house and take Mrs. Ogilvy into custody too. Hold on a minute——"

He had heard a noise in the room, and turned to look over his shoulder. At the mention of his wife's name Mr. Ogilvy had half risen from his chair, but Dryden had taken a quick step forward, and the other man had sunk back again.

"All right," went on Gregory, "I thought he was going to give trouble, but he's not. Have you got all that? Yes, at once. I'll charge them both when I get to the station myself."

Gregory rang off and, picking up the telephone directory, rapidly turned the pages. He found the number he wanted, and gave it to the girl at the desk. This time he had longer to wait, but eventually a voice answered him.

"Mr. Walter Danbury, sir? Inspector Gregory speaking.

I'm sorry to trouble you at this time of night. Are you all right, sir? Good. I thought you'd be relieved to hear that I've arrested him." Gregory gave a mirthless laugh. "No, not Muir: James Ogilvy, didn't you guess? No, Muir's all right. Yes, I'm afraid it must be a shock to you if you didn't guess. Pity yours isn't a daily paper, sir, it'll be headline news in tomorrow's late editions. I'm sorry, perhaps I shouldn't have said that: of course he's been a close friend of yours for years. Tell me, sir, I don't imagine you'll be going out again tonight? Well, because there are gangs out in the street, at all events there's one. No, don't worry, sir, just see your doors are locked."

Gregory rang off.

Mr. Ogilvy, meanwhile, was recovering his self-possession.

"I don't know what the devil you are doing, Inspector," he said angrily, "but I can assure you that you are making a very great mistake. I suppose you can show me a warrant for my arrest?"

"No," said Gregory bluntly, "I cannot. In the light of information received, Mr. Ogilvy, a police officer very often has to act on his own responsibility. But you'll have ample opportunity tomorrow to make complaint, that is, if you still wish."

"I shall certainly do so," said Mr. Ogilvy. His temper appeared to be mounting. "I want you clearly to understand——"

"And I want *you* to understand," snapped Gregory, interrupting him, "that you'll be wise to reserve your defence. I've given you one warning already. Of course, if you really wish to incriminate yourself, I can't muzzle you. But you've had my advice, given publicly."

Mr. Ogilvy's shoulders drooped, and he relapsed into silence. He looked desperately tired, and his eyes held the look of a cornered animal.

Muir cleared his throat and spoke for the first time.

"I think perhaps I can help," he began.

Gregory fixed a baleful glare upon him.

"The less *you* say at this juncture the better," he snapped.

Once more silence descended on the little room, a silence that was almost unbearable. Mr. Ogilvy sat limp, staring hopelessly at the carpet before him. Muir shifted uneasily in

his chair, and occasionally licked lips that seemed to be very dry; whilst Margaret, still standing behind him, glanced from one to the other of the little group with dumb bewilderment and horror in her eyes. Dryden and Gregory, the inspector still with the revolver in his steady hand, stood motionless with their backs to the mantelpiece.

Dryden's thoughts had switched from the human tragedy that had been enacted before him, and now revolved around his beloved apparatus. How was Apparatus 'K' affected by Mr. Ogilvy's treason?—for treason it must surely be. James Ogilvy, with his knowledge and wisdom, would have appreciated the significance of the modulator panel from the very beginning. Had he, then, already passed his knowledge to a foreign country, and if so what was the effect? Ryder's secret was still secure; the abortive raid of the previous night proved that. But supposing a traitor with full knowledge of the modulator panel was able to witness the trials at sea, what then? His turbulent thoughts were interrupted by the whine of gears and the sound of a car pulling up in the square outside.

There came a tramp of feet on the stairs, and then the door was flung open to show two uniformed constables standing on the threshold.

Gregory pointed with his revolver at Mr. Ogilvy. "Take him," he said curtly. "I'll see you at the station later."

In utter silence the two constables closed in on Mr. Ogilvy and, each taking an arm, they led him quietly away.

When the door closed behind them Gregory slipped his gun back in his pocket.

"Mr. Muir," he said severely, "before you let your suspicions run away with you, it's always worth making sure that you are suspicious of the right man."

Muir said nothing.

"Now," went on Gregory, "I want both of you to spend the night here, because tonight the streets aren't safe for you. I'll ring up the girl at the desk and book two single rooms for you, and I'll ring up your hostel, Miss Ferris, and tell them what I've done. Are you both agreeable?"

"Yes," said Muir, and Margaret nodded dumbly.

"Good. Tomorrow, of course, you can both go to the works and then back to your lodgings as usual."

Gregory spoke briefly into the telephone.

"That's all settled," he said. "Good night, Mr. Muir. Good night, Miss Ferris, and thank you for what you've told me: don't worry about the keys; you ought to have told me that long ago, but as it happens it has nothing to do with this business."

Then Gregory and Dryden were alone, and with a deep sigh the inspector took out his pipe and slowly filled it.

"There are times," he said, "when I hate my job, even though I'm doing good."

Dryden lit a cigarette.

"You've fairly shaken my faith in my own judgment," he said. "I'd never have believed it would end like this."

"It hasn't ended," said Gregory simply. "It's just beginning."

Dryden inhaled deeply. "I hoped you wouldn't have to say that," he said, "but I was afraid you might. There's somebody else?"

"Certainly. A thing like this is never a one-man show, Commander."

"No, I suppose not."

There was silence for a while, and then Dryden spoke again.

"You know, whatever else he may have done, I just can't see Ogilvy as a murderer."

"Mr. Ogilvy won't be charged with murder. He didn't kill Ewing."

"You mean the other man did that?"

"Yes. Incidentally, Ewing's intervention was their greatest misfortune. He didn't die for nothing."

"But what about Ogilvy's crack on the head? And, anyway, why indulge in all that violence when he knew all about my panel already? And what about the gang of thugs that attacked us tonight? There's so much that needs explaining."

"A man will go to great lengths to divert suspicion from himself," said Gregory slowly, "and the odd thing is that it's generally his effort to divert it that first draws suspicion on to him."

Dryden considered this. "I see," he said at length. "Well now, tell me this. Do you know who else we are up against?"

"I've a pretty good idea. But I don't know enough to

strike. I've good grounds for apprehending James Ogilvy, but nobody else as yet."

Gregory gave Dryden time to speak again, but he remained silent.

"Now, Commander," said Gregory, "I need your help. What time does the Director of Naval Intelligence get to his office?"

"About nine. Do you want to see him, or ring him up?"

"I want to see him. Will you take me up to London in your car?"

"What, to get there by nine? We'd have to leave here about five in the morning." He saw the gravity of the inspector's face. "Yes, of course I will," he concluded.

"Thank you, sir. Then I'll be ready at five."

Gregory said good night to the commander, and then took his hat and set out for a long sojourn in the police station.

CHAPTER XVIII

AT THE ADMIRALTY AGAIN

GREGORY slept soundly as the car travelled up the road from the west in the cool air of a lovely early morning, and was only awakened by Dryden when they stopped in Staines for a hurried breakfast.

"I think," said Dryden as they entered the Admiralty building soon after nine, "that I'd better see my own Director first. He's just as much concerned in this as D.N.I., and we want them together. Otherwise you'll have to tell your story twice."

Gregory said he would wait outside Captain Manwaring's office while Dryden told him what had happened. He expected that they would shortly join him, and that all three would then go and see the Director of Naval Intelligence. Presently, however, he was aroused from contemplation of an old picture of the Battle of the Nile which hung on the wall, by a familiar step in the stone-flagged passage, and he turned to see Captain Laidlaw, the Director of Naval Intelligence, approaching him.

"Good morning, Inspector," said Laidlaw genially. "You see the mountain going to Mohammed. I hear from my friend inside that you've more bad news for us. Come on, we'll go in together."

Manwaring, obviously deeply shocked by what he had heard, was sitting at his desk, and Dryden stood beside him.

"'Morning, Geoffrey," said Laidlaw, looking at him critically, "judging by your face I should say the news really is quite bad. What's happened?"

"The inspector will tell you. I don't know much myself yet. Help yourselves to chairs."

Captain Laidlaw listened impassively while Gregory told of the happenings of the last two nights which culminated in the arrest of Mr. Ogilvy.

"One gets used to surprises in this life," said Laidlaw at the end, "but I think this is the biggest I've had yet. What have you charged him with?"

"I'm holding him under the Defence Regulations," said Gregory. "I haven't got all my evidence complete yet."

Laidlaw nodded. "James Ogilvy, eh?" he murmured. "Pretty damnable, isn't it, Geoffrey?"

"I'd never have believed it. His firm's been working for us for years. You're quite sure you've locked up the right man, Inspector?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"What exactly has he done?" asked Manwaring. "And how did you discover it?"

"You can take it from me, sir, that your apparatus at the Bath and Bristol Works is fully compromised. Beyond that I'd rather say nothing at the moment."

Laidlaw eyed him keenly. "'Information received'?" he asked.

"You can call it that, sir."

"I see. I imagine there's somebody else in this business besides Ogilvy?"

"Oh yes, definitely, sir."

"You sound very positive. Do you know who it is?"

"I've a fair idea, sir."

"But you're keeping your own counsel."

"I'd rather do that. I may be quite wrong, and I wouldn't like to confuse you gentlemen."

"I've a fair idea, too," mused Laidlaw, "but I'll share mine with you presently." He wrinkled his brow. "Aren't your sea trials tomorrow, Geoffrey?"

"Yes," answered Manwaring, "unless this gives us cause to stop them."

"V.C.N.S. won't be back till midday, will he?"

Manwaring shook his head.

"As you've probably guessed, Inspector," said Laidlaw, "this will have to go straight to the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff as soon as we can get hold of him: you met him last time, Admiral Braithwaite. Unfortunately he's been away on a visit of inspection at Chatham, and only comes back this morning."

"I think you can now tell him as much as I can, sir," said Gregory.

"That isn't the point. He'll have to give a ruling as to what we're going to do about it, from the Navy point of

view, I mean. You'll want to know our intentions, won't you, before you can make your own plans?"

"Yes, sir. At least, I shall want to know whether your trials are cancelled or not."

"Right. Now, Geoffrey, what are the chances?"

"Let's get this thing straight," said Manwaring. "The modulator panel is definitely compromised, and Ogilvy may have sent its specification to any country on the face of the globe. But the rest of the gear, at Ryder's, is equally obviously secure. We're very much where we were before, except that we now know beyond doubt that somebody wants the gear and has part of it. We'll have to take greater precautions at the trials, but on the whole I doubt if we've cause to stop them. I should think they'll be held as arranged."

"And where will the chief danger be, sir?" asked Gregory.

"On board the ships," said Manwaring emphatically. "When I say ships I mean the destroyers. The fellow wouldn't learn anything in the submarine."

"He'd actually have to go to sea with them?"

"Yes. With the knowledge of the modulator panel he'd get all he wanted at sea. Otherwise he'd have nothing that really mattered."

"What about the radio-telephony?" asked Laidlaw.

Manwaring shook his head. "The R/T would all be Greek to him," he said.

"Then it's the destroyers we must watch. Have you any shore personnel going to sea with them, Geoffrey?"

"None at all, except for Dryden."

"There are the fitters, sir, for the final calibration in the Sound," said Dryden.

"Yes," said Manwaring rather impatiently, "but they'll only be on board from the Hamoaze to the Sound, and landed before the ships go to sea."

"There's something in that, all the same," said Laidlaw. "Why shouldn't one of the fitters get himself left on board on purpose?"

"But they're our own people, D.N.I., from our own laboratories."

Laidlaw shrugged his shoulders. "We felt just as sure of Ogilvy," he said.

"Well——" Manwaring hesitated, and stopped. "What

an unpleasant thought. Anyway, I'll take very good care that none are left on board."

"I'm not doubting your real people, Geoffrey: they're all right. But why shouldn't one of Ogilvy's gang mingle with them?"

"Yes," said Manwaring slowly. "That might be possible."

"And what about Admiralty permits?"

"There aren't going to be any."

"One might be forged," said Laidlaw drily. "Would the Commanding Officers turn back a man with an Admiralty permit?"

"I'll see that they do," said Manwaring grimly.

"It seems clear that my place is on board the ships before they sail," said Gregory. "Would it help if I went to sea with them?"

Manwaring shook his head. "No need, Inspector," he said. "Once they're at sea they can look after themselves. And I'm afraid you'd be rather conspicuous. A police officer on board ship has his profession written all over him."

"Then that's all clear so far," said Laidlaw. "Now let's see if my little surprise affects the issue. You're still interested in the man who landed at The Flats, Inspector?"

"Very interested indeed," said Gregory.

Laidlaw drew a flimsy slip of paper from his pocket and read from it.

" 'The man whom we know as Felix was absent from the annual June display of the armed forces: Felix has not been seen in public or private life for at least four weeks.' That," Laidlaw went on, naming a foreign country, "came in this morning from one of our agents. Curious, isn't it, that it should come today? It would take a lot to keep that fellow Felix from the June display."

"Felix," repeated Manwaring reflectively. "But surely he's too big a man to get mixed up in this kind of thing."

"Is any man too big for a really big job?" asked Laidlaw.

"It all depends," said Manwaring. "You don't send a fellow like that thieving and murdering and spying."

"If Felix is in this business," said Laidlaw calmly, "I don't suppose for a moment he's done any of those things. Someone else would do all that. Felix would be sent because of his

brains. You said something of the kind yourself at the conference with V.C.N.S., or perhaps Dryden said it."

"Speaking for myself, I'm afraid I don't know a lot about Felix," said Dryden, "except, of course, that he's a bit of a national hero."

"I'll tell you," said Laidlaw. "Felix is still young, and is known to have guts: he's a sailor to his finger-tips, and has a brilliant technical brain: this apparatus of yours is right up his street: he'd understand the technicalities of it, and also how we use it. Do you want any more?"

"No thank you," said Dryden, "that's enough. He seems to fit."

"Like a glove," added Laidlaw. "What about it, Geoffrey? Isn't your apparatus a big enough thing even for a man like Felix? It's a matter of sink or swim for us, and I think the personal risk to Felix would have justified them in sending an even bigger man."

"I can only say," said Manwaring, "that I hope you're wrong. If Felix is in this, then we're up against a very clever man indeed."

"He matches the footprint in the sand," said Gregory. "His features are too well known for him to pass our Customs and Immigration authorities unnoticed, and he must know that if he was recognized we should watch him very closely. If he wanted to reach this country unknown to us he'd *have* to land as that man did at The Flats."

"If we are dealing with talent of that sort," said Dryden, "don't you think we ought to reconsider the question of R/T?"

"We probably ought to reconsider a lot of things," said Manwaring, "but why the R/T in particular?"

"His own people may conceivably be developing similar apparatus for themselves. If they are, and if he knows the frequencies and dialling codes of our modulator panel, he might learn all he needed from the R/T without being on board the ships at all."

"What a jolly meeting this is," said Manwaring gloomily. "But D.N.I., if the man's been all this time in the country, why has nobody recognized him?"

"Because he's slipped round our barrier and no one else is thinking about him. We're a trusting nation, and inclined to take people at face value."

For a while there was silence in the room, and then the Director of Naval Intelligence spoke again.

"The point we now have to consider, Geoffrey, is this," he said. "How does this Felix development affect the probability of holding the trials tomorrow? That's what the inspector wants to know."

Manwaring sat staring at his blotter, sorting and marshalling his thoughts, and it was a long time before he answered.

"I think," he said at last, "that we ought to hold the trials tomorrow even if we knew Felix had details of the whole apparatus. If we postpone them, he'll probably bank whatever winnings he's got. The trials still have to be held some time or other. Let's have them tomorrow, when we know who we are looking for and where to find him."

"I imagine V.C.N.S. will agree with you," said Laidlaw. "He hasn't any use for half measures."

"Then I think that's all I need to know, sir," said Gregory. "You'd tell me if there was any change of plan?"

"Yes, of course," said Manwaring. "You'll want to go off and make your own arrangements. Where can we get in touch with you, the Yard?"

"Either there or the Home Security Office, sir. But I'd like to talk to Commander Dryden first, if I may, about a few matters of detail."

In Dryden's office, the inspector came straight to the point.

"There are just two things on my mind, Commander," he said, "and the first of them is this radio-telephony. The ships tell each other what to do by R/T?"

"Yes, that's the idea, and I still think it's a very important point that we'll have to watch."

"Of course we use R/T very much in our own mobile squads, but I haven't a lot of experience with it myself. I gather that you get better results on high ground than in a valley, don't you?"

"Yes, given sets of equal power you'd get greater range. At sea, of course, a tall mast is a help."

"I see. Now the other thing is this, Commander, I haven't, as you know, told Mr. Brancaster about the attempt to break into his works. If that was Felix, he would very likely have visited the works previously to see the lay-out. I'd like to find out if Mr. Brancaster has had any unusual visitors."

"But wouldn't he have recognized the man?"

"Would you, sir, if Felix walked into your office with a visiting-card describing him as Mr. William Smith?"

"No, I suppose not. Well, there's the telephone. You can ask him if you like."

"Thank you, I'd like to do that. But would you mind putting the call through, as you know the workings of your own exchange? I'll talk to Mr. Brancaster when you get him on the line."

Dryden gave a trunks number, and was quickly through to Ryder's. Then he pulled a memorandum pad towards him and jotted something down on it.

"No good," he said, "he's on a week's holiday. He started three days ago."

"Did they give you his address?"

"Yes, he's gone to Norfolk." He glanced at the memorandum pad. "Royal Sceptre Hotel, Cromer. He's playing golf."

"I suppose we'd get him there," said Gregory.

Dryden stared at his companion. "But he'd never have left the works if he knew anything was wrong," he said.

"But would he know that anything was wrong? As a general rule there's nothing suspicious in a call from an unusual visitor."

"Well no, I suppose there isn't. I'll try Cromer for you."

But once again Dryden laid down the receiver and shook his head.

"You're out of luck, Inspector," he said. "That was the Royal Sceptre, and Brancaster's out on the links. They expect him back for lunch and you could get him then, unless he has lunch in the club-house."

"Then I'll put a call through myself later on," said Gregory. "One last thing, about the journey to Plymouth, how are you going to travel?"

"I was going to take the night train from Paddington. But now I think I'd better drive my car down over-night so as to be sure of reaching the ships before the fitters. Would you like to come with me?"

"I should like to very much," said Gregory. "If you're going to be driving all night, Commander, I suggest you get some sleep this afternoon. You'll have a busy day ahead of you tomorrow."

CHAPTER XIX

THE COMING OF THE FITTERS

THE first blush of dawn was paling the stars behind them as the car slid quietly through the sleeping streets of Plymouth and Devonport, and drew up at the big dockyard gates.

"The *Claymore*, sir?" asked the police sergeant on duty. "Would you be the two Admiralty gentlemen I was told to expect?" He took the slip of paper which John Dryden handed to him. "Right, sir, you'll find her down at Number 7B Jetty. You know the way?"

The car moved slowly forward, picking its way carefully over the rough cobbles of the silent dockyard. It moved between great buildings of stone which housed stores, offices, and workshops of every description, all served by railway lines which made driving difficult. It swung left-handed towards the river, passing on its right a frigate refitting in dry dock: the growing light showed a patchwork of red lead on her upperworks, her guns shrouded in canvas covers heavy with dew, and a sleepy-eyed Quartermaster sipping cocoa near her gangway. Now there were no more buildings ahead, but the masts of ships etched against the sky.

Dryden stopped his car on a jetty flanking the Hamoaze. In front of him lay the destroyer *Claymore*, her bridge structure and big streamlined funnel shining pearl grey in the early morning light. Her three sisters lay alongside her, and a shimmer of heat showed above the tops of the funnels, whilst the air was filled with the dull muffled roar of powerful boiler-room fans which sucked in the air through great intakes to feed the hungry furnaces below. The ships were coming to life, and there was a movement of men on the *Claymore's* forecastle.

As Dryden climbed stiffly out of his car, he saw the Officer of the Watch send a messenger to tell his captain of their arrival. Dryden was in no hurry to go on board. He did not know how much the Captain had been told, and hoped he

would have the sense to come down and meet him on the jetty, where Gregory's presence could be explained in more privacy than would be found on the destroyer's upper deck.

Commander Hugh Milbrook, the Captain of the *Claymore* and Divisional Commander of the four ships, did not keep him waiting.

"Hallo, John," he hailed, as he swung himself up on to the gangway and came down to the jetty. "You are earlier than I expected." He dropped his voice to a lower tone. "This is a very interesting story that I've heard, though the C.-in-C. didn't give me much detail when he sent for me last night. Is this your inspector friend?"

"Yes, but officially he's supposed to be my technical assistant. He wants to talk to you before we go on board."

"I believe you are leaving the jetty at half-past six, sir?" asked Gregory.

"Yes, we're going down to The Sound for calibration before we sail."

"I'm afraid I shall have to come ashore before you go down river, sir, whether I've got my man or not. You are landing all the fitters from The Sound, aren't you?"

"Yes, in our own boats. We'll see they all go. The other Commanding Officers know about that."

"Is there any possibility that anyone else may board the ships in The Sound, sir?"

"None at all. There's no cause for any boats to come alongside. If anyone tries, we won't let him on board."

"I'd rather you did let him on board, sir, if you don't mind. Let him on board and keep him until you can get hold of me: that is, if you can delay your sailing."

"I see. Yes, that can be done, and I'll tell the other ships. How can I get in touch with you?"

"The Commander-in-Chief's office will know where I am, sir. Can you send them a message?"

"Yes, I can send a signal straight to Mount Wise. Any other problems?"

"I don't think so, sir. As you see, I haven't brought any police officers with me. I suppose your sailors could give me any help I needed in making an arrest?"

Milbrook grinned broadly. "They'd love it," he said. Then he led the way towards his ship.

From somewhere ahead of the *Claymore* could be heard the dull rumble of a heavy oil engine, and as they reached the edge of the jetty Dryden saw, tucked in under her bows, the long, low hull of a submarine: she was charging her batteries, her muffled exhausts kicking up a pother of white water near her stern. Men clad in white sweaters, blue trousers and leather seaboots were working on her casing, and there came a splash as they cast off one of the hawsers securing her bows to the jetty.

"Is she working with us?" asked Dryden.

"Yes, she's the *Tempest*," answered the Captain of the *Claymore*. He named the submarine's Commanding Officer, and waved to a figure on her conning-tower as he climbed the gangway to his own ship.

Except above the heated engine- and boiler-rooms, the dew was sparkling like diamonds on the *Claymore's* deck; and the air was cool and clean and fresh, though a light haze, faintly tinged with smoke, lay over the Hamoaze and gave promise of heat during the day. Overhead the sky was of purest duck's egg blue, whilst to the eastward, beyond the dockyard cranes and chimneys, it was stained with the first soft colours of sunrise.

Dryden had always loved the dawn and sunrise, which he had seen so many times at sea. He loved the gentle colouring which so far outmatched the splendour of the sunset, and the little dawn wind which springs up at sea, heralding the new day and bringing renewed hope and vigour. Now he marvelled that he should appreciate the beauty of this lovely morning, when so much was at stake. He had no doubt whatever that it was a momentous dawn. On this glorious day, whilst the people of Britain went about their work and pleasure in blissful ignorance, a desperate battle of wits would be fought out: someone would win and someone would lose, and on the winning and losing depended the destiny of nations.

Dryden followed the Captain to his cabin and there, whilst he changed into uniform and sipped a steaming cup of cocoa, he spoke briefly of his hopes and fears. At length he got up and shook himself. The warm cabin was making him drowsy, and his eyes felt heavy with sleep; yet he was filled with a feverish restlessness urging him back on deck.

"Hugh," he said, "I must go out and see what's happening. May I go where I like in your ship today?"

He first went down to the compartment which housed Apparatus 'K'. It stood there, polished and shining, amidst the quiet hum of dynamos. He checked the voltages and certain of the adjustments, and he spoke with the Electrical Artificer on watch. He found nothing wrong there.

Then he went back on deck to look for Gregory, and found him on the Bofors Gun Deck, abaft the big funnel. He had chosen a good watch tower, for here he was above the gangway and just forward of it, and would have a clear view of all who came on board. The inspector wore an old tweed jacket above a brown overall suit, with a somewhat elderly green hat pulled down over one eye. He leaned casually against one of the guns, quietly smoking his pipe, and was clearly some kind of fitter taking his leisure before the calibration.

The sun had climbed above the roof-tops of Devonport, and was shining brightly and warm; and on the far side of the Hamoaze the green slopes of Cornwall beckoned invitingly. All the day was fair: it was a morning for high spirits and happiness, and a sailor securing the sea-boat just forward of the gun deck was whistling cheerfully. Then as Dryden glanced up the river it seemed to him that the haze near Saltash Bridge was thickening a trifle. Was it possible that this glorious sunshine was going to yield to fog, bringing with it a postponement of the trials and all the incalculable results which would arise from delay? Surely not, he thought: surely this could only be morning haze which would lift by nine o'clock and give way to a day of cloudless sky. Yet he felt a deep sense of foreboding. These four ships were prepared for whoever might come to them, and yet something seemed to be stealing into the atmosphere which robbed the day of its beauty. Maybe it was no physical change in the weather, but simply the foreknowledge of someone very sinister who was even now approaching the ship, possibly mingled with the fitters, or perhaps quite openly in the sureness of his immunity.

Once again Dryden shook himself as he realized that he was giving way to the fatigue of the last forty-eight hours. The ships were ready, and if the last round of the drama was to be played out on board the *Claymore*, then at least he would play his part in familiar surroundings, working with men who

had known a lifelong training similar to his own: it would be the enemy who had to work on strange ground.

A step sounded on the steel rungs of the ladder leading to the gun deck, and Dryden turned to find a young Lieutenant, the First Lieutenant of the *Claymore*, approaching him.

"My captain sent me up to you, sir," said the First Lieutenant. "There's a lot of talk in the mess-decks about these trials."

"Why, Number One? What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong with the ship's company, sir, they're just talking. It was the coxswain who reported it to me."

"What are they talking about?"

"Nothing very definite, sir. Would you like to see the coxswain? He's just down on deck."

"Yes, I should, very much."

The torpedo coxswain, a Chief Petty Officer of many years standing and the senior rating in the ship, clattered up the ladder and saluted.

"What's the trouble, Cox'n?" asked Dryden.

"Nothing very much, sir. But there's some of the lads saying they don't like it, that we've got the police in the ship, and that something's going to happen."

Despite the seriousness of the occasion, Dryden burst out laughing. "It's no good, Gregory," he said, "you might just as well come and join the conversation. They're quite right, Cox'n," he went on, "but I'd rather you didn't tell them so: here's the police force."

Gregory found himself facing a man taller than himself and with even greater breadth of shoulder; a man young in years, not much more than thirty-five, he guessed, but old in experience and wisdom so that a serene self-confidence was stamped all over his features. Gregory liked what he saw, and knew he could work with that man: the coxswain, meanwhile, was thinking just the same about Gregory.

The inspector smiled. "I wonder where I went wrong," he said. "I thought I was playing my part rather well."

"It takes more than a Scotland Yard inspector to fool a destroyer's ship's company, doesn't it, Cox'n?" said Dryden.

"Yes, sir," said the coxswain simply.

"Now then, Cox'n, what exactly are they saying? Is it

because we've got the police on board that they think something's going to happen?"

"No, sir, it's the other way about. It's because something's going to happen that we've got the police on board. It's difficult to say just what it is, except that it's got something to do with your apparatus. It's been common knowledge these last three nights that something's wrong and something's going to happen."

"These last three nights?" exclaimed Gregory. "But it's only three nights since——" He checked himself.

"I'm afraid you'll never understand this, Inspector," said Dryden. "But the coxswain understands it, and so do I, just a little. I don't suppose anybody could tell you where the thing began, but if the Lower Deck says something's going to happen in the *Claymore* today then I'm not going to dispute it, for something probably will. The sailor knows a lot of things long before his officer knows them, doesn't he, Coxswain?"

"Yes, sir."

Gregory shook his head in bewilderment.

"This is beyond me," he said. "I cannot see how this ship's company could know before we knew ourselves."

"It's probably got nothing to do with what we know," said Dryden. "The sailor's no fool. When people see him in the Devonport bars and dance halls they may think what a jolly and carefree man he is. But he's no fool, and when he puts two and two together he seldom makes five."

"It's this way, sir," said the coxswain, addressing Gregory. "Somebody wants to know when the fitters are coming on board, and when the ships sail, and when the trials begin. That's so, isn't it? Well, somebody's got to find out. And if the sailor gets asked questions like that, and he thinks they shouldn't be asked, then he doesn't forget in a hurry. Mind you, I'm not saying that's what happened this time, but it's an example."

"It's pretty obvious that I needn't come to sea with you," said Gregory. "I can better leave that part of the job with you gentlemen."

"Well, thank you, Cox'n," said Dryden. "You've confirmed what we think too. Number One, if you hear anything more definite, do please let me know."

The First Lieutenant and the torpedo coxswain disappeared down the ladder.

"And that," said Dryden, "is that. God knows what *will* happen, but you can now bet your boots, Inspector, that *something* will." He glanced at his watch. "Those fitters ought to be here soon. We are due to sail in twenty minutes."

Gregory suddenly stiffened, and then quickly relaxed again.

"I think," he said, "that they're just coming. A Navy omnibus has just turned into this road. Would you mind going over to the other side of the deck, Commander? I'm afraid your uniform may draw attention this way."

Dryden walked across the gun deck and rested his hands on the guard rails, his heart beating quickly. All around him, and in the other three ships at which he looked, men were cheerfully preparing the vessels for sea, all ignorant of the drama which might be played out so close to them in a few moments. The outside ship was even now preparing to slip, and he could see her captain on his bridge.

He heard the bus draw up on the jetty, and the tramp and shuffle of feet, and the protesting creak of the gangway as the weight of men tilted its balance.

Then the *Claymore's* deck was filled with the sound of voices. "The *Sabre*? She's the outside ship." "*Rapier*? Next ship to this one, mate." He saw a crowd of overall-clad figures passing beneath him, over the brow leading on board the *Rapier*, where some moved forward whilst others passed onwards to the *Cutlass* and *Sabre*.

The shuffling of feet died away, and Dryden turned round. The inspector was still leaning against the gun, still placidly smoking his pipe, still calm and unruffled. Dryden knew a sudden revulsion of feeling, a sense of acute anti-climax, as he realized how much he had counted on this moment.

The inspector shook his head and smiled.

"Not yet," he said, "but he may still come, for he still has a few minutes before you sail." And then, as if divining Dryden's thoughts: "We learn a lot of patience in my walk of life. If he doesn't come now, I still have another card to play. That is what matters, to have one more card in hand than your opponent; and we must just hope that he's played his last. Tell me, who are all those men, and what are they doing?" He pointed to a new group of overall-clad figures

which had approached the ship and now stood idly at the edge of the jetty.

"That's the party of Dockyard Riggers, who take away the gangway and cast off our hawsers when we slip." Dryden glanced forward, and saw a string of gaily-coloured flags climbing to the *Claymore's* masthead, to be answered by a wisp of bunting from the distant signal station. "We're just asking permission to proceed, and I think you'd better get ashore. You're quite clear about where we are going for the trials, aren't you? They start at eleven o'clock."

"Yes." Gregory tapped his breast pocket. "I can quickly pick it up again on my map. Thank you for saying I can use your car: I don't want police cars in this business."

Gregory cast one more wistful glance up the dockyard road, and turned again a vigilant eye on the party of Riggers, checking their numbers. Then he let his gaze roam over the ships, and to his astonishment saw that where four had lain there were now only three. The *Sabre* had sailed: she had gone silently, with neither fuss nor ceremony. He had not heard a single order given, and he was impressed. He had always imagined that the departure of a warship would be marked by some, at least, of the bustle and commotion to be seen in a big London terminus when an express train was starting on its long journey. The simplicity of the *Sabre's* sailing was far more impressive in its quiet efficiency, and he felt more than ever assured that he might safely leave the seaward side of the drama to these men who were trained to a lifetime's service of the sea.

He clambered down on to the upper deck, and thence down the gangway on to the jetty.

He saw the Riggers run the gangway ashore, and then move forward and aft to tend the hawsers. He looked up at the bridge, and saw the Captain raise his hand, and a hand raised in answer from the *Claymore's* forecastle. A signal was given, some hawsers splashed, and the *Claymore's* bows began to pay off into the stream under the thrust of the young flood tide. A man right aft answered a telephone, there was another splash, and a brief flurry of white water before the propellers bit into the tideway and took hold, to drive the ship swiftly and silently down the harbour towards the sea.

The sailing of the ships left Gregory, for one of the few

times in his life, with an extraordinary feeling of loneliness. Five short minutes earlier the four ships, totalling about eight thousand tons between them and carrying all of a thousand men, had lain there, apparently secured to the jetty for the rest of time. Now there was nothing but the blue Hamoaze and the green shore of Cornwall beyond.

He turned and walked slowly across to Dryden's car. He had spoken to Dryden of patience, but in truth he was very dispirited, for he had counted much on taking his man in the dockyard. Now he had only his one more card to play, and he could but hope and pray that it was the ace of trumps.

CHAPTER XX

THE SAILING OF THE SHIPS

DRYDEN leaned over the side of the bridge, watching the *Claymore's* boat returning from the shore. She was a fast power-boat, and her bows were up, and the whitened water splayed out from under her hard-chined hull as she sped swiftly over the calm surface of The Sound. She reached the ship and hooked on to the falls which were hanging from her davits, and as she was hoisted clear of the water a flag signal which had been flying at the *Claymore's* mast was hauled down, and Dryden heard the clanking of the cables as the four ships began to weigh their anchors.

He took one last look up the harbour, still half expecting to see another boat approaching them; but except for a small yacht, her sails furled, and making slow progress on her auxiliary engine against the flood tide, nothing was moving. The fitters had all landed. No one else had attempted to board the *Claymore* or her sisters, and the ships were about to sail for the trials with only their own ships' companies on board. It seemed that the enemy must have other plans.

Dryden turned his head and looked down on to the forecastle. The anchor cable was coming in steadily. Two men were playing jets of water on to it from fire hoses to wash off the mud, and others were scrubbing the wet links with brooms before it clanked its way round the capstan to the cable locker down below. Right forward a signalman stood with his hands on the halyards of the Union Jack which hung limply from its staff: his eyes were on the Lieutenant in charge of the forecastle, and at a sign the Jack came fluttering down to tell the world that the *Claymore* was aweigh.

It all seemed so normal and peaceful that Dryden for a moment found it hard to appreciate how much was at stake that morning. Her Majesty's ships were spread all over the world, and in the course of a year the weighing of their anchors

must run into countless thousands as they proceeded on their lawful occasions. This was just such an occasion, and yet today something unlawful and wholly deadly was afoot. The enemy had not yet shown his hand: but he would act, because he needed the knowledge which could be learned today. How would he act? A host of doubts and misgivings welled up into Dryden's brain, thoughts to which he could give no name, but which he knew would redouble his vigilance.

Another flag signal climbed up the *Claymore's* mast, was answered by her sisters, and hauled down. The engine-room telegraphs clanged, the muffled roar of the boiler-room fans deepened, and under the smooth and effortless thrust of her turbines she gathered way and steered for the open sea. Out on her quarter Dryden could see the *Rapier* listing slightly as she turned to follow in her leader's wake, the bow wave rolling so smoothly from her sharp stem that it showed scarcely a break of white.

The long, low shape of the breakwater, with the squat fort in its centre, slid past upon the port hand, and as the *Claymore* rounded the lighthouse on its western end she gently lifted her bows to the soft and silky caress of a low ground-swell. From her bridge as she turned, the other three ships came into view following closely in her wake with the ease of long practice, not a vestige of smoke showing from their funnels, and the only visible sign of life a little group of men on each forecastle securing the anchor cables.

The breeze of their passage freshened as speed was increased, and when the bold outline of Rame Head came abeam course was altered away to the south-westward. The sun shone warmly from a cloudless sky, for the early-morning haze had cleared; and the calm sea stretched away, blue and inviting, to a far horizon broken only by the slender tower of the Eddystone Lighthouse and the faintest feather of smoke beyond.

The deep note of powerful aircraft engines caused Dryden to look up. A big Sunderland flying-boat was passing overhead, steering a similar course to the *Claymore*.

"Is that our aircraft, Hugh?" he asked.

Milbrook nodded. "Yes," he said. "She's out early. I expect she wants to test communications with us in good time, and I dare say she also wants to have a look at the *Tempest* before

she dives. I'm going to spread the Division now," he went on, "but it will still be an hour before we reach the rendezvous."

He gave an order to his Yeoman of Signals, and in obedience to the flags the *Rapier*, *Cutlass* and *Sabre* swung out of line. For a moment a light brown haze hung across the *Rapier's* funnel. Then the bow waves increased, and the whitened wakes of the three ships humped up astern of them as they raced up to form a broad line abreast on their leader.

Dryden left the bridge and went down below for another look at his beloved apparatus. All was well, and the Electrical Artificer was humming cheerfully to himself as he recorded the voltages in a notebook. There was nothing to be done: the rating on watch, a Chief Petty Officer, was a fine fellow and clearly understood his job. The efficient running of the apparatus might safely be left to him. Indeed, Dryden realized that he need have no fears for the safety of the apparatus itself, for the enemy wanted it to work. It was in the operations and control rooms that the enemy's interest would lie, and in the handling of the ships themselves.

Dryden returned to the upper deck and glanced overside at the rolling bow wave. From close behind him a stokehold hatch slammed with a familiar clang, and from forward came the smell of soft soap and wet corticene to tell him that the mess decks and flats were being scrubbed out. There was nothing at the moment which he could usefully do, and he decided to walk around the ship to revive familiar memories which might for the time being dispel his cares.

He visited the engine-room where the fast-running turbines hummed quietly, their control wheels surmounted by a mass of brass-rimmed gauges which spoke of steam pressures. Then back to the upper deck and aft, above the gearing-room where the big reduction gears, which cut down the high speed of the turbines to the more modest speed of the propeller shafts, whined like a motor-car climbing a steep hill. Right aft he came to the quarter-deck and here for a moment he paused, looking out beneath the white ensign to the tumbled water of the wake, whilst the deck beneath him shook and quivered to the muffled thunder of the propellers.

At length he turned and walked forward again, the wind of the *Claymore's* passage clutching at his cap until he reached the shelter of her raised forecastle beneath the bridge. He

turned into the wireless office, where all was quiet save for the hiss of air from the forced ventilation system, and he spoke for a while with the Petty Officer Telegraphist. All was well: communication with the flying-boat was good, and there was nothing unusual to report.

Satisfied, Dryden climbed two ladders and entered the operations room immediately under the bridge. Here he was in the nerve centre of the whole ship, where all the intelligence received was sifted and passed to the Captain. It was here that the danger lay, for this was where the enemy would wish to be. For a moment his nameless fears returned to him as his glance took in the officers and men assembled round their instruments. Was it possible, he wondered, that the enemy had one of his creatures amongst them? No, that was absurd, for this was the *Claymore's* normal ship's company which had lived and worked together for months. Then he wondered if the flying-boat could possibly have an unauthorized passenger. But that was a matter beyond his province, and surely the Admiralty or the Commander-in-Chief, Plymouth would have attended to it: nevertheless he wished he knew for certain.

The operations room was in half darkness, for the steel dead-lights had been dropped over the portholes in order that the illuminated instruments might show more clearly, and the lighting was limited to a few shaded lamps above chart table and desk. In the main, all was quiet save for the ticking of the gyro-compass repeaters and the automatic plotting-table which recorded the ship's course and speed on the chart, and over which the nagivator leaned, his brow slightly furrowed as he pencilled a faint line on its surface. In one corner stood the radar screen, looking something like a small television receiver. A shaft of light revolved steadily around its dark face, which was marked with the points of the compass, and as the light passed from west through north it painted on the screen a complete outline of the cornish Coast from Dodman Point back to Rame Head: to seaward, a single recurring white spot upon the screen marked the Eddystone Lighthouse.

Here, too, all seemed to be well, and Dryden returned to the bridge. The Eddystone now stood up boldly on the port hand, but otherwise the four destroyers seemed to have all of the glassy sea to themselves: even the feather of smoke

which had stained the horizon as they left harbour had vanished.

"Where's the Sunderland gone to?" asked Dryden.

The Captain waved an arm towards the front of the bridge.

"Somewhere ahead there," he said. For a while he scanned the horizon through his binoculars. Then he spoke into a copper voice-pipe which stood beside the compass.

"Pilot," he said, "where's the Sunderland? I've lost sight of him."

"I'll tell you in a moment, sir." It was the voice of the navigator speaking from the operations room. "He was ahead of us the last time I looked."

There was a pause, and then:

"How many aircraft have we got working with us, sir?" asked the navigator.

"Only one: the Sunderland that flew overhead some time ago."

"I've got two aircraft on the radar screen, sir. Can I ask the Sunderland which he is?"

"Yes please."

Through the voice-pipe Milbrook and Dryden could hear the voice of a telegraphist calling the Sunderland on radio telephony, and the somewhat hoarse and distorted answer. Then there was silence, whilst the navigator marked the aircraft's position on the chart.

"The Sunderland's to the south-westward of us, sir," reported the navigator, adding the number of miles distant. "The other aircraft is about the same distance to the south-eastward. The new aircraft doesn't seem to be on passage, it appears to be orbiting."

"I'm coming down to look," said Milbrook briefly.

He clattered down the steel ladder and strode across to the radar screen.

"Now then," he said, "where are they?"

"There's the Sunderland, sir," said the navigator, pointing to a small white smudge which appeared regularly on the screen to the south-westward, "and there's the other."

Milbrook wrinkled his brow and stared intently: his eyes were accustomed to the strong sunlight of the upper bridge, and to him the illumination of the screen seemed very dim.

"I've got the Sunderland," he said at last. "But where's the other?"

The navigator pointed to a tiny spot in the other direction, so faint as to be almost imperceptible.

"There, sir," he said. "It's very faint, but quite steady."

"Oh yes, I see. It must be a very small aircraft —unless it's very high."

Dryden had joined the Captain, and together the two gazed at the screen for a long while in silence. Then Milbrook turned his head.

"It's another aircraft sure enough, John," he said, "and I don't like it. No one has any business to be orbiting out there while the trials are going on. He could see too much. What do you think yourself?"

"I think," said Dryden quietly, "that this is what we've been waiting for, Hugh." A great load seemed to have been lifted from his mind, for he felt that the enemy had shown his hand at last: he must surely be aloft in the strange aircraft. Now, at last, they had something with which they could grapple.

"I agree with you," said Milbrook simply. "Pilot, recall the Sunderland by R/T and tell him to orbit the *Claymore.*" Then he turned and spoke into the voice-pipe. "Officer of the Watch, send the Yeoman of Signals down to me."

Many years of command had schooled Hugh Milbrook to make swift decisions, and he had made one now. The unknown aircraft must be investigated, and the trials of Apparatus 'K' must be delayed until its presence had been satisfactorily explained.

"Yeoman," he said, "make a visual signal to the ships saying: 'Trials temporarily postponed: Apparatus "K" is not to be referred to by wireless or radio-telephony'."

As he moved towards the bridge ladder, Milbrook paused.

"Thank you, Pilot," he said. "It was smart work on your part spotting the other fellow."

Dryden followed Milbrook back to the bridge, and there they waited while the Sunderland came in from ahead, looking first like a fat sea bird, and growing steadily in size until she was orbiting the ships in a slow circle with a quiet muttering of throttled-back engines. A signalling lamp from the *Claymore's* bridge chattered out a brief message to her, and then

she banked steeply and her exhaust note increased to a deep roar as she steadied on a course to the south-eastward and began to climb. She looked a slow and lumbering aircraft, but her size quickly diminished and she was soon lost in the glare of the sun.

Once again there was nothing to do on the *Claymore's* bridge except wait, and to Milbrook and Dryden time now seemed to stand still. At the moment everything depended on the Sunderland which had been sent out to investigate the unknown aircraft, and until her report was received it was useless to plan any farther.

Presently she returned and again began her patient circle of the ships, but this time it was her signal lamp which spelled out a message word by word. The Yeoman of Signals was reading the message, and when the flashing of the lamp ceased he approached his captain.

"Signal from the Sunderland, sir," he reported. " 'Four-engined aircraft of unknown type flying very high. Aircraft turned away as I approached.' "

Milbrook stepped swiftly to the voice-pipe.

"Pilot," he said, "is the unknown aircraft still there?"

"Yes, sir. She opened her distance as the Sunderland approached her, but now she's back again orbiting in much the same place as before."

Milbrook turned to his friend. John Dryden was the moving spirit behind Apparatus 'K', and now represented the Admiralty itself. But it was on Milbrook that lay the whole responsibility for the safe conduct of the trials.

"John," he said, "I'm going to cancel your trials."

He took a signal pad and wrote rapidly on it, then tore off the top sheet and handed it to the Yeoman of Signals.

"Tell the wireless office to make that signal to the Commander-in-Chief, and tell them to prefix it 'Emergency'."

He glanced at his wrist-watch. The hands stood at ten minutes to eleven.

"The *Tempest* will have dived by now, John," he said. "We were due to begin in ten minutes' time." He glanced overhead, where the Sunderland was still patiently circling, awaiting further orders. "I think we will have a little fun," he went on. "It will keep our visitor guessing and will gain time

for us. It will also keep the *Tempest* guessing," he concluded with a grin.

Once more he spoke to his Yeoman of Signals.

"Make this visual signal to the Division and the Sunderland: 'Carry out normal exercise using old apparatus and old procedure'."

Dryden leaned over the side of the bridge as the ships began to change their formation. Below him, he saw the cook's mate empty a bucket of potato peelings down the chute from the *Claymore's* upper deck, and he watched the seagulls which had been planing so smoothly astern of her swoop down upon them, screaming vociferously. It was all so ordinary, so homely and so peaceful, or thus it would have seemed without that one faint mark on the radar screen.

Now there was nothing to do but wait upon events. The ships had played their part, and the hunt had passed into the strong hands of the Commander-in-Chief.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ELEVENTH HOUR

GREGORY drove thoughtfully out of the dockyard and, parking Dryden's car in the city, walked to police headquarters: but there was no news for him. He was prey to an agonizing doubt. His judgment told him that he knew his man, yet he had not a single shred of proof. Even assuming that he was right, he knew that any ill-considered or premature move might well be fatal: he must be sure, and he must take his man with the plans of Apparatus 'K' in his possession, otherwise those vital plans might still leave the country. And now, since early the previous evening, the man in whom his chief interest lay had vanished: this tended to confirm his suspicions, but left him no nearer to success.

Once more he drew out his map and studied it, wondering afresh if his reasoning was sound. His dispositions were made, his own plan was settled, and he had only this one more card to play unless the enemy revealed his hand. The police of Devon and Cornwall were alert, and as far as lay within their power all roads to the coast between Start Point and the Lizard were watched, as were the estuaries from which an unknown launch might sail. But for what car were the roads watched? Gregory had been quite unable to tell them.

And now he was about to take up his last defensive position, to commit all his forces to action from which it would be almost impossible to recall and redispose them. The initiative henceforth lay with the enemy, and his own freedom of movement had gone. Had he considered all the plans which his enemy might make? Or had he left some loophole?

A glance at the clock told him it was time he was moving. Three plain-clothes men joined him in the passage, and they walked together to Dryden's car. Driving back through the streets of Devonport, they crossed the Hamoaze in the Torpoint Ferry and for about four miles followed the Liskeard road. Here they swung left-handed down to Whitesand Bay,

and left again up the hill leading back towards Rame Head. About half a mile beyond the cluster of wooden bungalows which huddle on the steep hillside, Gregory pulled in to the side of the road and stopped.

Here the road had reached the very summit of the high cliffs. On the one hand stone-walled fields of standing corn, fast ripening in the hot sunshine, mingled with those in which red Devon cows contentedly grazed the rough Cornish pasture: on the other the grassy hillside, clothed in gorse and brambles, dropped steeply to the edge of the cliffs at whose rocky feet a long, slow swell broke in creaming white.

On this wonderful soft blue morning the view was superb. On the skyline ahead of the car the slender spire of the little stone church of Rame stood sentinel on the bold bluff headland which thrust proudly out to sea. To the westward the wide sweep of the coast swung in a majestic curve to the great hump of Dodman Point, beyond whose cliffs a thin blue pencil of land stretched away again towards the Lizard. Beyond the surf at the foot of the cliffs, the sea lay calm and blue and serene, its surface unbroken save by the far-distant Eddystone Lighthouse which guards the approaches to Plymouth Sound.

Gregory looked around him critically. He had no eye for the soft beauty of the morning, nor for the grandeur of the Cornish coast, but he seemed satisfied.

"Yes, this is my place," he said. "Wilson, take this car on into Rame and park it. If the other men aren't in position yet, come back and tell me. Otherwise you know what to do."

He got out of the car with his remaining two companions, and for a while he spoke with them. One of them moved on up the road, whilst the other went back the way they had come.

Gregory stood alone, watching until they had taken cover, and then he took a final glance around the wide, empty countryside. Only the stone wall bordering the road would provide concealment for his watchers, but this it would do as far as the eye could see. Lateral movement, however, would depend upon gates, for the fields themselves were divided by more stone walls, and a man scrambling over them would be conspicuous at a great distance.

He climbed over the wall into the pasture which lay beside him, and was glad that it held no stock which might be disturbed by his presence. He crossed the field to its western

side, where a closed gate led to more pasture in which the red Devon cows were grazing. The gate swung smoothly and easily, and latching it again he crossed the full width of the field to its eastern boundary wall. Here the gate, beyond which was standing corn, seemed badly hung and awkward, but he saw that a man could crawl beneath it.

Satisfied that his own immediate movements promised no difficulty, he returned to the wall which flanked the road, and took up a position in its shelter from which, unseen himself, he could watch the road both to east and west.

So began a long period of patient waiting. The sun shone down warmly from a cloudless blue sky, and far overhead a lark was singing in an ecstasy of happiness. Once an elderly, open Morris, driven by a farmer, trundled along the road from Rame and disappeared down the hill to Whitesand Bay; but except for that, and the lark, the morning was silent and still.

Now that he was committed to his plan, all the turmoil of doubt in Gregory's mind had gone. His judgment and his brains had sent him here. No man could do better than his best, and by that he was content to stand or fall. His thoughts turned to Dryden and the *Claymore*, and once again he conjured up a vision of the quiet precision with which the four ships had sailed from the dockyard jetty and passed down the Hamoaze to The Sound; and he pictured the ships' companies as they sailed for the trials, calm and unruffled, yet wide awake and alert for any sign of their foe.

As if in answer to his thoughts, a slim grey shape came sliding swiftly out from behind the sheltering headland, a small ship built for speed, with a raking mast and a big streamlined funnel. Behind her came three others, steadily holding their distance from their leader as though linked together by an invisible chain. He heard the distant drone of heavy aircraft engines as a big flying-boat, low over the sea, came into sight following them: compared with the ships she looked slow and ungainly, yet she quickly passed above their masts and, setting a course towards the Eddystone, drew ahead and vanished in the blue distance. A little wisp of colour climbed to the masthead of the leading destroyer, and in answer the others swung out of line and increased their speed, to leave three broad white wakes drawn out straight

on the calm surface of the sea as they hastened to form a wide line abreast on their leader.

It was instinct which drew Gregory's attention back to the road. A big, black saloon car was breasting the hill from Whitesand Bay, and he dropped farther behind the shelter of his wall as it approached. He heard the scrunch of its tyres and the quiet muttering of a powerful engine as it passed, and the soft tones of its radio playing a selection of light music. He raised his eye again to the level of the wall, and watched the car slow down and stop some two hundred yards farther up the road. Through its rear window he could see the back view of two figures, and his heart beat more quickly, for he thought that he knew the man who sat in the driving-seat.

Gregory gave a sign to his watcher to the westward, and keeping close under cover of the wall moved towards the car. His quarry was still ahead of him when he reached the dividing angle of the wall, and following it for half its length he slipped under the gate into the field of corn. Here was perfect cover, with the wall on one hand and the high-standing corn on the other, and he made good speed until once again he heard the sound of the car's radio. He stopped when he judged he was abreast of it, but he dared not raise his head, and time seemed to stand still while he waited for one of its occupants to speak.

"My friend," said an unknown voice at length, "those are undoubtedly the ships, but surely this is not the place? Can we not go farther, to that headland, Rame Head I think you called it?"

"No, Felix." It was Brancaster's voice, and Gregory felt an intense relief as he knew his reasoning to have been true. "No, Felix, Rame Head itself is no use to us. Beyond the church lies the Coastguard Station and there the road stops, and we cannot take the car farther. Here we are right on the edge of the cliff, and we have the highest stretch of clear ground that we could find for many miles."

"But this road, it is a public road, is it not? How can we tell that other cars will not come, and stop near us?"

"They may come," said Brancaster calmly, "but they will not stop here. The Englishman who stops to admire a magnificent view like this, Felix, does not do so near another Englishman. He likes to feel that he is alone with Nature, that he has made some great discovery, and that the lovely scene which

God has laid out before him is his private property. During the afternoon, no doubt, many people will come here and bring their tea with them, but our work will be finished by then."

There was silence for a moment, and then Brancaster spoke again.

"It is time that we tested," he said simply.

The music of the radio ceased, and Gregory heard the snap of a switch, and a sound as though a panel in the car's dashboard had been opened.

"It is you who will want these when we start working," said Brancaster. "The photo-miniatures of the dialling codes are on the top, and the specifications are all at the back in case you need to refer to them."

Gregory saw Sergeant Lyddon joining him from the westward, and he prepared for action. Only the stone wall separated him from the men he wanted, and they actually had the vital plans in their hands.

"Hallo aircraft . . . Hallo aircraft," said Brancaster. "This is Guide calling. Can you hear me? Can you hear me?"

Gregory's heart sank, but a moment later he felt thankful that as yet he had made no move. Sergeant Lyddon was now crouching at his side, but this was no time to strike. The enemy had an aircraft aloft. How much did that aeroplane know? One thing seemed certain, and that was that if it had warning from Brancaster, or indeed if it had no answer from him, then it would fly home with such knowledge as it already possessed. Gregory must hold his hand, and trust to the keen eyes on board the destroyers to sight the aircraft and in some way to deal with it.

"Hallo aircraft . . . Hallo aircraft," repeated Brancaster. "Can you hear me? Can you hear me?"

There was a faint crackling of atmospherics in the car's loud-speaker, but that was all.

"I cannot see him, Felix, and I cannot hear him," said Brancaster. "He's probably too far out for these batteries. We shall have to use power."

Gregory heard the engine of the car spring into life and settle down to a soft and contented purring. There came a click as small gear wheels meshed, and then the faint, high-pitched whine of a fast-running dynamo.

"Hallo aircraft . . . Hallo aircraft, Guide calling. Can you

hear me? Can you hear me?" There was a pause, and then: "Ah, that's better," said Brancaster.

A voice was answering from the loud-speaker, the speech at first distorted, but then ringing clear and true.

"He is there, Felix," said Brancaster. "Speak to him yourself."

A gentle breeze sighed fitfully across the high cliffs. It was soft as thistledown, yet sufficient to prevent Gregory from hearing what was said.

Then: "Tell the fool to speak English," snapped Brancaster angrily. "We cannot have your language used today."

The breeze died away, and now it was Felix who was speaking.

"It is well, my friend," he was saying, "and now he understands that only English must be spoken. He sighted the submarine before she dived, and he sees the four destroyers spreading out and steaming towards her position. There is only one aircraft working with them, a big flying-boat, and that is far below him and much too slow to worry him even if he is sighted."

"Good," said Brancaster. "Then tell him we are switching off for twenty minutes. An Englishman, Felix, switches off the engine of his car when he stops in a place like this, because he likes to save petrol. We must play our part well."

The quiet muttering of the car's engine died away, and there was silence. Gregory's brain was racing. Supposing the ships had not sighted the strange aircraft, then he alone knew of it. Somehow he must send back the news, not to police headquarters, but to Mount Wise. Only Sergeant Lyddon was with him, and he needed at least two men, for doubtless Brancaster and Felix would be armed: but he realized that was a chance he must take.

He laid a hand on the sergeant's arm, and very quietly led him away from the vicinity of the car.

"Keep out of sight," whispered Gregory urgently, "and work your way up to Rame. Get the news of this aeroplane through to Mount Wise. There'll be a direct telephone line in the Coastguard Station. Send one of the other men, no two of them, back to join me."

Sergeant Lyddon moved away swiftly, and Gregory returned alone to his position abreast the car.

"You know, Felix," Brancaster was saying, "the modern motor-car might have been designed for our especial benefit. How else could we so easily provide a mobile transmitter and receiver of radio-telephony? How else could we carry its aerial unnoticed? And how else can a man have eyes in the back of his head except through the driving-mirror of a car?"

"It is well done," said Felix, "and your fitting, which provides the power from the engine, it is ingenious."

"I'm an engineer," said Brancaster simply.

"Meanwhile," said Felix contentedly, "these few minutes of anticipation, in which we can picture success drawing near to us, are very pleasant."

There was a pause, and then Felix went on again.

"The anticipation, my friend, is a thing which perhaps I can savour more fully than you, for I know what is going on, out there, in the ships. On board those slim grey destroyers which now look so small to us, there are men keen and vigilant, concentrating wholly on their job, perhaps a little tense with suppressed excitement, for they know the importance of these trials and the tremendous benefit which the apparatus should bring to their Navy: little do they know that their secret is about to be wrested from them, that their Navy will soon be reduced to impotence and their seaborne commerce shattered and sunk. In the flying-boat too, as it circles patiently above the slow-moving water, the same thrill of excitement will be felt, perhaps more than on board the ships, for they will all be young men in the aircraft."

"And the submarine?" asked Brancaster. "What of her?"

"Ah, for her it is different. For the submarine it is little more than a routine dive. She is simply the target, and there is no action she can take which will disconcert your remorseless apparatus."

Gregory heard the scraping of a match. One of the men was evidently lighting a cigarette, or a pipe.

"My friend," said Felix quietly, "I have often wondered, but I have never liked to ask: why is it that you, a successful man in your own country, are working for us?"

There was a long silence, and when Brancaster spoke his voice was hoarse and strained.

"Many years ago," he said, "there was a girl in one of the Embassies, in London. But there was trouble."

"Yes?" prompted Felix. "Or do you not wish to speak of it?"

"Oh, I'll speak of it," said Brancaster roughly. "I haven't spoken of it in all these years, and it will do me good. I tell you there was trouble. The First Secretary, or perhaps it was the Second Secretary, was in trouble with our authorities: something to do with the passing of information and breach of diplomatic privilege. He was sent back to his own country, *persona non grata*. And she was sent too: she, who was so young, little more than a child, who cannot have known what she was doing. I tried to follow her, but there was difficulty about getting a visa. And then the war came, and I could do no more."

Felix made no comment, and when Brancaster spoke again the roughness had gone from his tone: instead there was something cold and deadly.

"They sent her back to her own country," he repeated. "I'd have given her British citizenship, and whatever she'd done in her youth and ignorance, she'd never have done it again. But they sent her back. Have you ever known loneliness, Felix, real loneliness, intense and agonizing? As the years go by it breeds hatred of those responsible."

"I see," said Felix. "Yes, doubtless it has been hard on you."

"But come, that is enough to my personal troubles," went on Brancaster, speaking more lightly. "It is time we spoke again to the aircraft."

"Yes, it is time," answered Felix, and now there was exultation in his tone. "You and I, my friend, are approaching what may be the supreme moment of our lives."

Once again Gregory heard the contented purring of the car's engine, the click of small wheels as they enmeshed, and the whine of the high-speed dynamo. He knew that the time of crisis was near. For the moment he must still hold his hand: the unknown aircraft must have no avoidable warning, and he must trust yet to the vigilance of the ships and perhaps Sergeant Lyddon's telephone message. But before Brancaster and Felix could finally fulfil their purpose he must act, and if necessary act alone.

"Ask him," he heard Brancaster say, "if he fully understands the procedure. He must report all the movements of the ships and all that he receives from them. You must not

forget, Felix, that only you hold a copy of the dialling codes, and you must give him his instructions."

For a few moments Felix spoke with the aircraft, but Gregory could not catch the reply and neither, apparently, could Brancaster.

"I couldn't hear that," said Brancaster. "What did he say?"

"He understands the procedure, but he has had difficulty. The flying-boat came his way, climbing steadily, and he had to increase his distance." There was a worried note in Felix's voice. "The flying-boat has gone again, but he thinks it may have sighted him. My friend, I do not like it."

"Neither do I," said Brancaster, "for at a greater distance his work will be more difficult. But surely the flying-boat cannot have been suspicious, or it would never have turned back?"

Felix made no answer.

"Why are we getting no news of the trials?" continued Brancaster. "What is happening now?"

"I will ask him," said Felix. "I repeat, I do not like it. Hallo aircraft . . . Hallo aircraft, Guide calling: have you nothing to report?"

"Hallo Guide, I have nothing to report," said a faint, hoarse voice through the loud-speaker.

Gregory heard one of the men in the car stamp his foot on the floorboards in evident annoyance.

"Hallo aircraft," snapped Felix, "are you listening on the ships' wavelength?"

"Yes, I hear the ships," answered the voice. "I hear them working. But they say nothing yet about the trials."

There was a long pause, and then the voice spoke again.

"Ah, they speak now of the trials. But they do not call them trials, they say 'the exercise'. I do not understand, for they do not use the new procedure. The ships are changing their formation, they are forming up as they used to do."

"My friend," said Felix, and Gregory could hear that his tone was grim, "I say once again that I do not like it. Your ships are not using their Apparatus 'K'. They are using the old hunting method which they employed during the war. And it is now past eleven o'clock when the trials should have begun."

Gregory, for his part, felt a deep wave of relief and thankfulness sweeping over him. The ships had not failed: they had

found their enemy and knew the danger. And his contentment was increased as he saw the figure of Constable Hayes moving swiftly in the shelter of the boundary wall to join him.

"Perhaps," he heard Brancaster say hesitantly, "there has been a breakdown in Apparatus 'K'. Perhaps they are filling in time until it is repaired."

"No," said Felix grimly. "Your ships would not waste their time today with the old methods. Apparatus 'K' is not broken down. The change of method is deliberate. I think their suspicions are aroused."

"But this is nonsense, Felix. Even if our aircraft has been sighted, why should the captain of the ships suspect it? Why should he stop the trials? And if he did, why substitute the old procedure? Would there have been time for all these things to happen so quickly?"

"Your countrymen," said Felix, "are generally very stupid, but not always. I will talk to the aircraft again. Hallo aircraft, Guide calling: will you describe all that is happening?"

"I do not understand what is happening," said the voice. "The ships are behaving as they used to do, and the messages they pass are the same as they used to be."

"What was the last message you intercepted from the ships?" snapped Felix.

"The last message," began the voice . . . but the rest of the sentence was drowned by a shrill whine, which grew and swelled in a rapid crescendo.

Gregory looked up. High overhead, the duck's egg blue of their wings but faintly visible against the blue of the sky, three small jet fighters stormed angrily out to sea to the south-eastward, towards the morning sun.

"Attention, aircraft, attention!" commanded Felix. "Three jet fighters approaching you from the north-west. Take guard!"

With a sign to Constable Hayes to follow him, Gregory moved a few yards along the wall towards the rear of the car, and quietly climbed into the road. The two men in the car had their backs to him, and were gazing fixedly out to sea as though stunned. Neither had an eye for the vengeance that was so near them, but Gregory still stayed his hand, for it was not yet his battle. He saw Felix raise a microphone to his lips.

"Attention, aircraft! You must avoid the fighters at all costs."

"Hallo, Guide." The voice from the loud-speaker was high pitched and strained. "Hallo, Guide, I see the fighters. They are steering to cut me off from my base. . . . They are turning towards me, and climbing above me."

"Oh God!"—it was a cry of torment wrung from Felix's chest—"why didn't I send home the plans and codes while there was time?"

"Because," said Brancaster calmly, "the Intelligence man's report must be verified and complete before it's of value."

Felix turned on him fiercely. "You take it very lightly, my friend. But if this is a trap, remember that it closes on you as well as on me."

Brancaster shrugged his shoulders. "It's no trap of my setting," he said.

"Hallo, Guide." Now there was fear in the voice from the loud-speaker. "The fighters are circling round me . . . they are driving me off my course . . . they are driving me towards the land, and I am losing height."

"They'd never dare to fire," muttered Felix.

Gregory's keen eyes were still on the men in the car just ahead of him, but his thoughts, like theirs, were many miles away, where the wheeling planes were fighting out their grim and silent battle of wits and will-power. Whose will would be strongest? Who would take the greatest risk of an appalling head-on smash in the air? Whose will-power would break first?

"They drive me towards the coast," repeated the voice. "My God, we cannot stand it, we will fire upon the fighters . . . we are shooting at them now . . . one dives upon us: it does not shoot back, but we do not yet hit it."

"Stop him!" cried Brancaster. "That's murder!" He snatched at the microphone, but Felix jerked it from his grasp.

"The popular word nowadays," said Felix with a harsh laugh, "is liquidation."

There were a few moments of deathly silence and suspense.

"Now the others dive upon us," said a despairing voice, "and now they also shoot . . . their shells rip our fuselage . . . we burn . . . ahhhh . . ."

Far out to sea a long black smoke trail, with a hint of

fire at its head, plunged madly downwards. High above it the sunlight glinted for a moment on the wings of a small plane doing a victory roll.

"Liquidation, I think you said, was the word," said Brancaster.

"Yes, liquidation," repeated Felix savagely. "That is what will one day come to you and all of your stupid race. Liquidation. That, no doubt, is what happened to your girl-friend when she reached home. That's what she deserved, liquidation, for her stupidity and failure."

Gregory saw a lightning move of Brancaster's hand, and as he sprang towards the car heard a muffled report. He flung open the door, but Brancaster had already turned his gun, which was fitted with a silencer, towards his own temple.

"It's too late," said Brancaster calmly. "He's dead. Don't move, and don't send your man round behind me: I want to talk for a moment before I follow him. I don't know how much you know, Gregory. I've lost. But now at least I've saved you a public trial of friend Felix. You might care to consider what that would have meant."

Brancaster pressed the trigger, and collapsed across the steering-wheel.

For a moment Gregory looked at the two huddled figures in the car, and then he thoughtfully walked to the edge of the cliff. His broad task had been to ensure the safety of the realm, and that involved more even than the safety of Apparatus 'K'. During the last hour he had realized that a public trial of Felix would have aroused such violent national tensions that it would have been hard indeed to avert a war. And now——? Well, it would lie in the hands of his superiors. There would be ways and means, perhaps of minimizing the matter, perhaps of hushing it up altogether: and diplomacy would have a chance to play its part. Oh, undoubtedly this was the better way.

In quiet meditation he gazed out across the merciful blue sea that had closed for ever upon an unknown plane. The dark smoke trail that had stained the summer sky had thinned and vanished, and as he lifted his hat in a gesture of thankfulness the sun seemed to shine more warmly, and he heard the song of the lark overhead.

CHAPTER XXII

SUNSET

At five minutes to nine that evening Gregory drove Dryden's car on to No. 7B Jetty in Devonport Dockyard. The *Claymore* was approaching her berth with her three sisters following in open order, but the tide was again flooding and the ships stood over towards the Cornish shore. The water under the *Claymore's* stern boiled into foam as her starboard engine drove astern, and turning swiftly on her heel to stem the tide she slid up alongside the jetty. From forecastle and quarter-deck, coiled heaving lines were thrown to the men waiting to secure her, and on the ends of the lines followed the wire hawsers which were made fast to the dockyard bollards.

From somewhere in the town a church clock began to strike the hour of nine, and the ships' bells rang out twice. From the *Claymore's* quarter-deck came the note of the Bos'n's pipe sounding the 'Still', followed by the high, clear notes of the sunset bugle in a cruiser moored upstream. On board the *Claymore* work ceased, and the ship's company stood quietly at attention, facing aft, whilst the white ensign was lowered on its staff. Then the gangway was run across to her from the jetty, and Gregory went on board.

Hugh Milbrook led him to his cabin. Dryden was already there, and got up with a smile of welcome.

"Congratulations, Inspector," he said. "It's really been quite a day, hasn't it?"

"It might have been worse, Commander. But I don't think that I deserve the congratulations, because I think the honours have been pretty evenly shared. Tell me, how did the trials go?"

"Marvellous. We surfaced the submarine at about half-past eleven and sorted ourselves out. Then we sent the ships' companies to dinner while we opened our distance from the submarine, and began the trials at half-past two. But tell me what you've been doing. We only got a very sketchy cypher signal from the C.-in-C."

Contentedly smoking his pipe and sipping a whisky-and-soda, Gregory spoke fully of his morning on the cliff-top road.

"I'd never have believed it," said Dryden at length. "You shook me badly enough when you arrested James Ogilvy. Of course Brancaster knew the details of the rest of the gear the whole time, and with the plans of the modulator panel in his possession his knowledge was complete—except for the way we use the thing. How did you discover that Brancaster was the villain of the piece?"

Gregory gazed thoughtfully at his whisky-and-soda.

"It's been a very interesting case," he said, "because there was no real evidence until the very end; not even any circumstantial evidence until three nights ago.

"There are two special points which you should keep in mind, for they provide the background. The first is the footprint in the sand. There was no reason why it should be connected with your apparatus, but it was a dramatic and expensive way of landing and therefore important; and in point of fact it was Felix's footprint. The second thing to remember is that Captain Manwaring and yourself gave me the first hint of the truth when you spoke of putting the cart before the horse. You both said that a thief who wanted the plans of your apparatus would go to Ryder's before raiding the Bath and Bristol, and you, Commander, said so in the presence of Brancaster."

"So I did," said Dryden. "That must have made him think."

"It did make him think, very hard," said Gregory simply.

"When I was first called to the Bath and Bristol," he went on, "there was no particular reason to suppose that your apparatus had been tampered with, but I decided to concentrate on that aspect of the robbery as being the only one worthy of the crime.

"At that time it was generally assumed that the drawer of Mr. Ogilvy's desk had been broken open to get the duplicate key of the safe, and at once that led me into one of those stupid, maddening little difficulties that so often confuse the real issue. I didn't know it at the time, but the secretary, Miss Ferris, had foolishly left Mr. Ogilvy's key-ring, about which he was very particular, lying unguarded on his desk throughout the dinner-hour. This, coupled with the police

interest in the safe and its keys, was more than her nerves could stand, and she lost her head and lied to me: and I knew that she lied.

"Muir also was very unsatisfactory. There was no doubt that he was either withholding information or else deliberately trying to mislead me. There was also no doubt that he was in love with Miss Ferris, and this began to involve the Danburys. Muir and Miss Ferris and young Charles Danbury formed the sides of the eternal triangle: Muir loved Miss Ferris: Miss Ferris loved Muir, but was trying to shake him out of his slovenly appearance and his obsession for his nuts and bolts, and wished to teach him a lesson: whilst to Charles Danbury, Miss Ferris meant nothing in particular.

"This eternal triangle aggravated a mutual dislike between Muir and Charles's father, Walter Danbury. From Walter Danbury I learned that Muir had in the past been an active supporter of the World League of Emancipated Youth. I dare say you remember something about the League?"

"Yes," said Milbrook, and Dryden nodded his head.

"Danbury told me," continued Gregory, "that he had suspicions of Muir, and implied that he had asked him questions about the League. Muir, for his part, told me that Danbury had asked questions that he had no business to ask. I didn't press this point with Muir for I guessed that, whether Muir lied or spoke the truth, his answer would be the same: he would tell me that Danbury asked questions about the firm's contracts, which were no concern of a journalist.

"In the beginning, then, it seemed possible that something was wrong either with Walter Danbury or Muir, but the waters were very muddied, and all this might be no more than a matter of mutual dislike and suspicion. The suspicion was undoubtedly there. Indeed, coupled with intense jealousy, it even caused Muir to doubt the girl he loved and wonder if she was being used as a tool by the Danburys.

"At about that time I began to search for a link between the attack on James Ogilvy in Whitemore Road, and the burglary of his office and the murder of the night-watchman. It seemed to me too much of a coincidence that both these misfortunes should befall the same man in so short a time. Supposing the attack in Whitemore Road had been deliberately planned, then surely its object could only have been to

get a letter, which was in Ogilvy's wallet, from a somewhat mysterious van Arlberg; or else to take an impression of the safe key. The letter from van Arlberg led me nowhere. But if the object was to take an impression of the safe key, then the breaking open of the drawer in Ogilvy's desk could only have been to throw suspicion on the night-watchman: in this case, the presence of the duplicate key in the drawer was purely fortuitous, and inquiry into the question of who knew of its whereabouts was profitless."

"One thing at least seems certain," said Dryden. "If the night-watchman hadn't intervened in the burglary, we should never have known that the plans had been stolen, and our suspicions would never have been aroused."

"No," agreed Gregory quietly. "We owe a great debt of gratitude to Ewing. He was the beginning of all their misfortunes."

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and absent-mindedly examined the inside of the bowl.

"You know," he said slowly, "it was difficult to decide where to begin. But if I was to link the attack in Whitemore Road with the robbery at the works, then it seemed reasonable to start with the morning of the attack in Whitemore Road. Many people must have known that James Ogilvy would walk home that night, but not many of those were likely to be concerned with Apparatus 'K'. Brancaster and the dark horse, van Arlberg, had left the city: and Miss Ferris spent the evening in her hostel. But Muir, and Walter Danbury and his son, and Evan Davies the shop foreman, all had opportunity to carry out the attack: and it was possible that Mr. Ogilvy, believing some suspicion of which I was unaware was beginning to attach itself to him, might have arranged for the attack to be carried out by some unknown person in order to divert the suspicion. I told you no more than the truth that night in the Feathers, Commander, when I said that a man would go to great lengths to divert suspicion from himself.

"I had, then, several people about whom I might make inquiries, but my efforts were fruitless. The only thing I learned was that the man who landed on The Flats might have impersonated van Arlberg on the next day and thereafter. And there matters rested until three nights ago. On that night, as you know, a man broke into the *Straightforward*

offices, and another man was nearly caught at the back of Ryder's Works in Mantringham.

"In the *Straightforward* building I failed to catch my man, and all I could say with reasonable certainty was that he was tall, and young, and considerably more athletic than I am myself. This description fitted Muir, and Muir had a possible motive, the removal of papers which linked him with the League. But there were two very curious features of this burglary. In Danbury's hearth was a great mass of paper ash; yet in the room there was no smell of burnt paper, and if the burglar had just burnt it there should have been. Now you might suppose I was too busy to notice the smell when I first flung open the door; but I didn't think like that, for I have a very sensitive nose. Moreover, if the burglar had already found and burnt what he came to find, why had he begun a search of the next-door office? I concluded that the ashes were nothing to do with the burglary, and that Danbury himself had been burning papers before he left the building earlier in the evening. Next morning, however, Walter Danbury disclaimed knowledge of the ashes, and that suggested that he had something to hide, that he had in fact burned papers which were incriminating to himself. With the help of a little suggestion from me, he telephoned later in the day to tell me the papers referring to Muir's League activities were missing. This I very much doubted, partly because of the quantity of ash in the hearth, and partly because I had not noticed in the drawers of his desk the file which had contained those papers. So Walter Danbury was now definitely one of my suspects."

"I don't understand this," said Dryden. "If Danbury's a crook, what about James Ogilvy?"

"Oh, didn't I explain?" said Gregory. "I'm sorry. There's nothing wrong with James Ogilvy. He's safely at home again with his wife, and I'm glad to say that he bears no ill-will. But Danbury's a crook sure enough, and Muir was right in suspecting it. Muir raided the *Straightforward* building to see what he could find. It's just the sort of foolish and impetuous and violent thing Muir would do: he hadn't a chance of finding anything.

"Now that same night," went on Gregory, "a man apparently tried to break into Ryder's Works. By that time the fact that the works were guarded was a very open secret; and

the man's cautious approach to the building, his fumbling with the window-catch, and his readiness with tear-gas bombs all suggested that his real object was a safe getaway rather than entry. In fact, it was a very brave gesture designed to draw the wool over our eyes: but it only aroused my suspicions. Who would want to draw the wool over our eyes? Only a man who already possessed Ryder's secrets. Who knew of your suspicions of the cart before the horse? Brancaster. And who, from Ryder's firm, was in touch with Ogilvy and acquainted with Danbury? Again Brancaster.

"The next night Miss Ferris came to me with her story of the forgotten key-ring, and told me of Muir's suspicions and how he had followed Mr. Ogilvy to Danbury's house. As I already knew of Mr. Ogilvy's intended visit and had by that time grave doubts of Walter Danbury, I'd taken the precaution of sending one of my own men to the house, and it was he whom Muir saw crouching beneath the study window.

"In the house, Commander, you rattled the sticks, and Mr. Ogilvy saw murder in Danbury's eye. If you hadn't been there, I've no doubt murder would have been done. As it was, Danbury guessed you would both come to me at the Feathers, and hurriedly organized his gang of roughs, and you've Muir's quick wit to thank for your escape. Danbury's the type of man who likes a gang available to help him in his dirty work, and doubtless he was in contact with the leader by telephone.

"This development put me in a very difficult position. I now felt convinced of Danbury's guilt, but I had no proof on which to arrest him, or Brancaster either. What is more, I'd no wish to do so until I knew I could ensure the safety of your specifications. I did the only thing I could think of. I took Mr. Ogilvy and his wife into custody, partly because I believed the lives of both were still in danger, and partly because I wished Danbury, and thus Brancaster, to believe I was following a false scent. From that time onwards, however, Walter Danbury and his son were shadowed.

"Brancaster had no cause to believe we were suspicious of him, and until last night his movements were quite open. By the way, it may have occurred to you that Cromer is not so *very* far from The Flats. At tea-time yesterday he unexpectedly paid his bill at the Royal Sceptre, saying he was moving farther along the coast. His car did indeed take the

coast road, but then we lost track both of the car and himself. It became evident that, if he was moving on to Plymouth as I believed, he had changed cars.

"Although Brancaster did not consider himself under suspicion, he knew that as a result of the Bath and Bristol trouble we were very much on the alert. Otherwise I feel he might have attempted quite openly to witness the trials from the ships: doubtless he could have taken Felix in the guise of one of his designers. Would that have been possible, Commander?"

Dryden shook his head. "I don't think we'd have allowed it," he said. "But if anyone outside the Service had asked for an Admiralty permit, then no one could have had better cause than Brancaster."

"I see. Well, even as things were, I must confess I expected one or other of them to try to board the ships in some manner. When they did not, it seemed that interception of the R/T was their only alternative. I suppose Brancaster must have considered the possibility of watching the trials with Felix from an aircraft, and turned it down because of the risk of the aeroplane being spotted and driven off, as of course happened. A car on a cliff road, however, should have been perfectly safe. Unfortunately the map showed just the one perfect watch-tower, and both he and I chose it."

Gregory stopped speaking, and Milbrook passed round the whisky decanter.

"There's a little more that we want to know," said Milbrook. "What has happened to everybody else?"

Gregory smiled. "I've done quite a lot of telephoning this afternoon," he said. "Mr. Ogilvy, as I told you, bears no ill-will for his 'arrest': he tells me Miss Ferris has withdrawn her notice to leave the firm, and doubtless she and Muir will soon be married: and van Arlberg is genuine enough—he called at the Bath and Bristol this afternoon, since Felix's death.

"I think Walter Danbury has been uneasy, and making his plans to get out of the country, ever since my first visit to him: and there is no doubt that, the night before last, it was only the 'arrest' of James Ogilvy that stopped Danbury from taking instant and precipitous flight. With James Ogilvy taken into custody, he felt he had gained just sufficient time to leave the country in a more leisurely and unobtrusive manner. Walter Danbury and his son motored to Harwich

last night, and were arrested there this morning before boarding a steamer for Holland. Charles broke down under questioning and confessed to a lot of things: and that's a funny thing, because to look at him you wouldn't think he had a yellow streak, would you, Commander? He and his father personally tackled Mr. Ogilvy in Whitemore Road, and also carried out the raid on the Bath and Bristol which resulted in the murder of Ewing. It was Charles who struck the blows in each case, but father and son are equally implicated. What did you say? Did Walter Danbury tell Brancaster he was running? Good gracious, no. 'Every man for himself'—that's Walter Danbury's motto, I think.

"The car which Brancaster used today has been kept quite openly for several weeks, without its R/T equipment, of course, in a little wayside garage in Norfolk, far off the main roads: no doubt that was the car in which he met Felix at the head of The Flats in the beginning of the month. Yes, garaged quite openly, in Brancaster's own name. Why should he trouble to conceal it? And that's where we've found his Mantringham car.

"Brancaster, the leader, was a very different type of man from the Danburys, built on a grander scale, whether you regard him as a man or a crook. He was courageous, he still retained some decent principles, and he possessed the artistic temperament which prefers to take the greatest risks alone. But his mind was warped by grief and loneliness. He had grown to hate his country and wished to ruin it, and in Apparatus 'K' he saw his chance. In Mantringham he had the greater part of the apparatus under his hand, but he still required knowledge of the modulator panel and this, in his trusted position in the public eye, it was difficult for him to get. He could not complete his self-appointed task single-handed. He needed help—from Felix, naturally—but also from someone in the Bath and Bristol camp, and there, in Walter Danbury the friend of James Ogilvy, he found his man.

"Walter Danbury and his son were double-faced and utterly unscrupulous adventurers, who lacked the driving force of Brancaster's hatred and also his personal courage, and I've no doubt Brancaster despised his mercenaries as much as I do myself. But time was limited and he had to use what tools he could find, and to Walter Danbury was given the task of wringing the secret from the Bath and Bristol.

"Danbury failed, and Brancaster had to force the pace. On a pretext of mass production of the apparatus he visited James Ogilvy, and that morning he learned what he needed to know: the specifications were kept in the safe in Mr. Ogilvy's office, and he carried the key in his pocket at the end of a heavy silver chain.

"Before leaving the city, Brancaster called on Walter Danbury and gave him his instructions. Danbury was to get an impression of the safe key, and thereafter raid the Bath and Bristol and secure photographs of the specifications. Doubtless the details of these operations were left to Walter Danbury, but I think we can assume that Brancaster emphasized the supreme importance of an undetected visit to the Bath and Bristol.

"There followed the attack on Mr. Ogilvy in Whitemore Road that same night, when Walter Danbury got the impression of the key; and later, the robbery of his office, the intervention of Ewing, and the murder.

"A warped mind is a very curious thing," went on Gregory reflectively. "I can imagine the fury of Brancaster when he heard of the murder. It meant, of course, the beginning of all his troubles; but I think it meant more even than that. I said that Brancaster still had some decent principles. His distorted brain would gladly give away the plans of Apparatus 'K', and thereby leave the country open to mass murder and destruction, yet he was no murderer himself in the ordinary sense and could not tolerate it in others. When he raided his own works the other night, he took a great personal risk with no more lethal weapon than tear-gas: and this morning he tried to stop the unknown aircraft from shooting at our fighters. He shot Felix, of course, but that was in a fit of blind passion: it's still murder, but rather different from calculated murder."

For a while Gregory gazed out through the cabin porthole, where the blue of the summer dusk still held some colour from the sunset. Then he raised his glass of whisky-and-soda.

"I'm afraid," he said quietly, "that least has been said about the most important man in this story. I suggest we might drink a toast to the memory of Ewing the night-watchman, who did not die in vain."

THE END

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